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Damien Sweeney
University of Louisville

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PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS: INTEGRAL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE
RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND SUPPORT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN,
LATINO, AND LOW-INCOME STUDENTS IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT
PROGRAMS

By

Damien Sweeney

B.A., Transylvania University, 2004

M.A.T., Bellarmine University, 2006

M.E.D., University of Louisville, 2009

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Human Development

University of Louisville

For the Degree of

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Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development

University of Louisville

Louisville, Kentucky

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A Dissertation Approved on

November 11, 2016

By the following Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Kyle Ingle, Chair

Dr. Bradley Carpenter

Dr. Jason Immekus

Dr. Ann Larson

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Abigail and my boys, Smith and Shawn. Abigail, thank you for sacrificing so much to help me reach the coveted DR.! Your sacrifice over the last 3.5 years has been nothing short of incredible. Boys, I want you to know that I set out to accomplish this goal knowing that one day I would have a family. I wanted you to learn from my example and understand that it takes hard work and resilience to realize your goals. I love you! To my mother, Catherine, my brother, Deryl, and my sister, Brandi, thank you for always believing in me and standing by my side during this journey. To my father, Deryl, you are dearly missed. Thank you for showing me what it takes to be a hard-working man who will stop at nothing to achieve his goals.

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I would like to thank my mother for being an educator and showing me that compassion for others is everything. You also taught me to work hard and humbly. Without you, none of this (my teaching career, my counseling career, and becoming Dr. Sweeney) would be possible. I love you with all of my heart!

To my chair, Dr. Ingle, you have been unimaginably gracious and hard working to help me accomplish this goal. You have been someone that I have grown to respect greatly. Throughout this process, I knew that I would only turn in my very best because anything else would be unacceptable. Your attention to detail and your desire to help me become the best researcher and writer possible has been nothing short of inspiring.

I would like to express sincere thanks to Dr. Carpenter for accepting me in this program and meeting with me outside of office hours to help me. You inspired me to look at “outlier” counselors and my research has been exciting and inspiring since the day you said those words.

Thank you to my committee who has helped me progress through this program. Dr. Carpenter, Dr. Immekus, Dr. Ingle, and Dr. Larson, you have been amazing to work with and gracious with your time.

My opportunity to participate in this program came because I had my first shot of being an outlier counselor at Seneca High School. Thank you to my leadership team and colleagues for supporting me through this process.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues, Tinisha Taylor and Mary McCarty for working so many weekends and nights with me to complete this program. Your tenacity, resilience, and support have been amazing. I could not have asked for a better team!

ABSTRACT

PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS: INTEGRAL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND SUPPORT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN, LATINO, AND LOW-INCOME STUDENTS IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT PROGRAMS

Damien Sweeney

November 11, 2016

Numerous studies have been conducted that show the importance of diversifying Advanced Placement Courses. However, Griffin and Steen (2011) state that:

Despite a vast body of literature that stresses the importance of school counselors in addressing inequities that exists in schools, few articles provide concrete strategies that school counselors can infuse in their practice. More research is warranted because many school counselors face barriers when trying to implement systemic change in the schools. (p. 76)

This qualitative research study is based on a collective phenomenological case study of six participants (five Professional School Counselors and one Director of School Counselors) who are interviewed using narrative inquiry. This study seeks to answer the following research question: How do school counselors remove barriers for culturally

diverse and low-income students by recruiting, retaining and supporting them in Advanced Placement (AP) courses?

Three major themes emerged that show graduate school programs, professional school counselors, and other educational leaders ways that they can create diversified systems within the walls of their schools. These themes included Systemic Changes, Minority and Low-Income Specific Strategies, and Common Pitfalls to Avoid.

An in-depth discussion of each theme gives graduate school programs, PSCs, and future educational leaders a tangible system that they may implement in order to increase minority and low-income student participation in Advanced Placement programs. This research was approached through a Critical Race Theory lens and works to liberate traditionally marginalized students while giving them access to a program that has the potential to positively impact their educations and futures.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There has been an achievement gap in educational outcomes between Caucasians and minorities for decades (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). There has also been a gap among students from middle to high-income households versus students from low-income households. In an attempt to remedy this gap, educators have gone to great lengths and used many strategies. While some of these strategies may have yielded isolated or minor improvements, we have not experienced a truly impactful and widespread change in student outcomes among students of color and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Ford, Grantham and Whiting (2008) state:

A litany of studies has been conducted, as well as conceptual and theoretical pieces, in response to this stubborn and pervasive problem. That is, theologians, policy makers, administrators, and educators have offered their views on this issue, but the Black-White achievement gap has been resistant to change. (p. 217)

Unfortunately, these gaps persisted and even widened in some areas. The disparities of high- and middle-income students compared to low-income students in standardized test scores and enrollments in more selective universities are just some of the disparities that create this gap (Reardon, 2013). Minorities and low-income students need opportunity and access if they are to make gains in achievement. Research suggests that when teachers build mental and emotional strength and when they are demanding and create lessons that utilize critical thinking skills, students that are African-American, Latino or low-income can achieve commensurate to their White counterparts or middle to high-income peers (Delpit, 2006). The teacher quality literature has sought to identify

characteristics of highly effective teachers as evidenced by their students' achievement gains and confirms the important contributions that teachers have on minority and low-income student achievement (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005).

As integral to student learning as teachers are, school districts employ other personnel, such as school counselors, that seek to facilitate the success of students. Very few studies exist that specifically explore the ways that Professional School Counselors (PSCs) can help. PSCs are stakeholders in school buildings that are uniquely positioned to be social justice advocates (Stephens, Arriaga & Lindsey, 2013). According to Stephens, Arriaga and Lindsey (2013) counselors are often called upon to deal with students unfairly characterized as underachieving, when far too often these students have been underserved and must be served in ways that may be new for many educators.

According to Lapan, Wells, Peterson and McCann (2012):

Findings from a growing body of research strongly suggest that effective counseling services are provided in some schools to some students but not in all schools to all students. Furthermore, students who have the advantage of receiving effective counseling services in their schools may have better K-12 academic outcomes and postsecondary successes. (p. 304)

By providing current and future PSCs with strategies for recruiting, retaining, and supporting minority and low-income students in Advanced Placement courses, disenfranchised students can potentially achieve things that they may have never thought possible. According to Handwerk, Tognatta, Coley and Gitomer (2008), research shows that academic placement in high school influences achievement and the likelihood of

high school graduation for students. While AP enrollment is only one way of placing students in a position to be academically successful in high school, it is a proven way of giving students an advantage (Conger, Long & Iatarola, 2009). Furthermore Klopfenstein (2003) states, “The academic culture provided by the AP Program can be particularly beneficial to minority students who may not be exposed to a culture of learning in other places” (p. 2). If PSCs can increase access to AP courses for minority and low-income students and provide adequate support to those who enroll, they will be offering these students an opportunity to excel commensurate with their Caucasian counterparts in academically rich and challenging classes.

Prior to this study, most of the literature offered to counselors on how to diversify Advanced Placement courses was by College Board, the company who created and currently oversees Advanced Placement programs internationally. While this company has positive intentions, their own practices for identifying AP students for schools may not be as all-encompassing as PSCs would like and their methods may not work for all schools trying to achieve this goal. Ford (1998) identifies several factors that are obstacles to the recruitment and retention of minority students in gifted education, including screening and identification issues, educational issues (quality of one’s education), personnel issues and retention issues. Ford (1998) suggests that alternative, innovative methods are needed to recruiting and retaining minorities in AP programs.

There remains a gap in the literature for counselors working to improve diversity in AP programs. Furthermore, little has been done to identify underlying barriers for minority and low-income students who are trying to enroll in AP classes and to create

systemic opportunities for PSCs to put into place in order to support these students.

Griffin and Steen (2011) state:

Despite a vast body of literature that stresses the importance of school counselors in addressing inequities that exists in schools, few articles provide concrete strategies that school counselors can infuse in their practice. More research is warranted because many school counselors face barriers when trying to implement systemic change in the schools. In fact, one of the biggest barriers is the lack of power that school counselors may hold in their schools. (p. 76)

By considering literature that addresses the problem of diversity in AP programs and qualitatively interviewing PSCs about their counseling and support methods, this study seeks to offer school counselors strategies to recruit, retain and support minority and low-income students for their schools' Advanced Placement programs. PSCs will also learn ways to veer from traditional AP programs so that they can design their own systems using some of the methods prescribed in this study.

By providing real world applications for PSCs, they can work towards improving the diversity of their AP programs while supporting minority and low-income students in gaining access to a viable and challenging curriculum that is proven to give them an advantage in high school academic success, college admissions and college academic success. Callahan, Hertberg-Davis, and Kyburg (2007) state that, "College entrance exams reveal that young people who take challenging classes, such as Advanced Placement courses, perform better than their peers regardless of their family or financial background" (p. 180). Many PSCs are aware that enrollment in AP classes can aid the

success of students. By equipping PSCs with tools to recruit, retain and support minority and low-income students for these programs, I will be creating more opportunities for counselors to push AP with their diverse students.

Purpose of the Study

I seek to answer the following research question: How do school counselors remove barriers for culturally diverse and low-income students by recruiting, retaining and supporting them in Advanced Placement (AP) courses? In so doing, I will identify tangible solutions and systems that PSCs report, which can inform university counseling programs, PSCs, and other school leader practices in school districts that ultimately improve minority and low-income students' access to challenging college preparatory curriculum, academic achievement, and postsecondary options.

Scope of the Study

In this study, five high school PSCs and one Director of School Counselors who work in a large urban school district in the southeastern region were interviewed. Through these interviews, readers will gain insight on how to implement systems and procedures that will increase enrollment, retention and support for minority and low-income students in Advanced Placement programs. The five counselors were chosen by the district's Director of PSCs (who will also be interviewed) based on her perceptions of counselors who currently implement unique practices for recruiting, retaining and supporting minority students in AP programs. This approach allows the researcher to build a system of supports for other PSCs to use when building more diverse AP programs.

I will utilize a phenomenological case study research design. According to Creswell (2014) a phenomenological case study uncovers meaning, while articulating procedures and systems. Using the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), I will provide research and practice based methods for Professional School Counselors to use when recruiting minority students to participate in AP classes. Creswell (2014) explains that CRT argues for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct. I will also explore ways for PSCs to retain and support these students in AP classes.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this study:

Achievement Gap: This refers to a higher-level of achievement by Caucasian students than minority students as measured by academic performance on standardized tests or with class grades.

AP: This refers to the Advanced Placement Program, a program in the United States and Canada created by College Board that gives high school students an opportunity to earn dual credit (high school and college) by passing an exam towards the end of each school year.

College Board: This refers to an organization that oversees and coordinates over 37 AP classes in partnership with colleges and universities. The College Board works with high schools to train teachers and develop curricula that help students meet the criteria for college-level learning in those areas (Lambie, Leva, & Ohrt, 2009).

Gifted Education: This term refers to students who have demonstrated the ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in general intellectual and academic aptitude (National Association for Gifted Children).

Intersectionality: The cross section between frequently marginalized groups based on race, sex or class and their propensity to overcome biases.

Low-income: This refers to students who receive free or reduced school lunch based on family income.

Minority: This term refers to students who are non-white.

PSCs: This acronym refers to Professional School Counselors, certified educators in schools trained to address all students' academic, personal/social and career development needs.

SES: This refers to socioeconomic status and is often categorized by people with low, medium or high-income households.

Limitations to the Study

This study utilizes a qualitative research design. There is a major difference between the validity of research in a qualitative study versus that of a quantitative study. Qualitative research seeks to understand the lives and stories of participants. This research method creates validity by working with the participants assessed to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of what they said in interviews are consistent with the message they wanted to say or express (Creswell, 2000). There will be a small group of participants (five) based on currently practicing PSCs that the director of counseling chooses in a large urban school district. As a result, some may question the methods used, choices made, or even the validity of my study.

One's positionality in relation to a research topic, community, and/or individuals under study may influence the themes or outcomes of a study (Milner, 2007). I am a PSC at my school and I work closely with the Advanced Placement program there. I view my systems and techniques to recruiting, retaining and supporting minority and low-income students for AP as unique. Because of my role and experience, I found this research project justified by the extant research and personally compelling. I plan to control for potential personal biases by interviewing other PSCs to understand more about their experience and systems without discussing my own experience during the interview. My role as a PSC held benefits to my research study, namely gaining access to informants. My process for exploring researcher positionality will be formally outlined in Chapter 3 (Methodology) and explored with greater detail in Chapter 4 (Analysis).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized as follows: Chapter 1 includes the introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, scope of the study, key terms, data collection, previous studies, gaps in the literature, and limitations to the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the Advanced Placement Program, the achievement gap, and strategies that help ameliorate this gap. Chapter 2 also discusses the role of PSCs in increasing AP enrollment diversity and supporting minority and low-income students in AP programs. Chapter 3 is an explanation of the research methodology used, data collection, and procedures of this study. Chapter 4 presents the descriptive narrative of the study's results and an analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes this study's major findings and includes recommendations for future research and policy implications.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, I seek to answer the following question: How can PSCs remove barriers for culturally diverse and low-income students by recruiting, retaining and supporting them in Advanced Placement (AP) courses? The literature review for this study will help the reader understand the importance of minority participation in Advanced Placement courses and how this participation can help close the achievement gap between white and minority students along with students living in varying households in terms of income. I will discuss a brief history of the Advanced Placement program that contextualizes the purpose of the program, the reasons it began and the progress that has been made since its inception. Furthermore, this review will address the importance of AP to student outcomes. Next, I will discuss the achievement gap and the many layers to minority or low-income students that impact this gap. I provide strategies that PSCs can use to help ameliorate the achievement gap along with ways for PSCs to increase AP enrollment diversity. Next, I discuss the difference between open enrollment and traditional enrollment in reference to the way students are recruited or chosen to participate in AP. Finally, I will discuss Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the theoretical lens chosen for this research. All of this is an effort to understand and expand on the work that PSCs can do in order to remove barriers for culturally diverse and low-income students by recruiting, retaining, and supporting minority and low-income students in Advanced Placement programs.

The Advanced Placement Program: A Brief History

According to Callahan (2003), AP classes were introduced in the 1950s in order to retain intelligent students in their home high schools. This program was developed because there was an overlap in what some of the brightest students in the United States learned in high school and college. One of the catalysts for the development of AP programs was John Kemper, Headmaster of Andover College writing a letter to the Fund for the Advancement of Education in 1951 (Rothschild, 1999). Kemper (quoted by Rothschild, 1999) wrote:

We are much concerned that some of our best boys seem to lose interest in their work during their first and second years of college. It looks as though the country might no longer be able to afford the waste involved in the transition from school to college, especially for gifted and well-trained boys. (p. 176)

In 1952, twelve headmasters, principals, and superintendents agreed on basic principles that would see the pilot of advance placement classes come into fruition. The Advanced Placement program immediately gained momentum, in part because of its association with Harvard University. Within a year, over 20 schools had signed on to participate in the program. Before the end of 1954, the first exams were administered for the Advanced Placement program.

Although there were good intentions, segregation and discrimination in schools at that time did not allow minority students (nor did it allow for other disenfranchised groups) to participate in the early days of AP. It was only until the late 1980s that a focus on disenfranchised students emerged. Rothschild (1999) noted that by 1988 participation in AP had increased over 140 percent compared to 5 years prior and that at this point,

almost 20% of AP students who took the end of the year AP exam were minorities.

Rothschild (1999) went further to say that in 1994, minorities represented 26.3 percent of students taking AP exams in the United States. In 2013, the United States Department of Education revealed that black and Latino students made up just under 40% of high school students in the country but only 27% of these students took an AP class. Furthermore, only 18% of that population passed an AP exam.

As one can see, some progress has been made in AP participation among minority students. However, vast differences remain in the number of minority students enrolling in AP courses and passing AP examinations when compared to white and higher socioeconomic counterparts. In 2014, the College Board indicated that over 300,000 academically prepared students in the country either did not take an AP class or attend a school that offered AP. College Board (2014) went further to say, “Despite significant progress, African American, Latino/Latina, and American Indian/Alaska Native students who show AP Potential through the PSAT/NMSQT still typically enrolled in AP classes at lower rates than white and Asian students” (para. 12). One way that states, districts, and schools are working to diversify their AP programs and overcome these obstacles is to change the policies that have traditionally been in place for allowing students to participate.

AP classes have traditionally been homogeneously populated courses as a result of students being commonly tested, tracked, and placed in these courses. Unfortunately, this creates a problem. Traditional AP enrollment does not necessarily take into account the population of the school and the opportunities for exposure that AP programs create for minority and low-income students. While minorities are a growing population in our

schools, the pools of students populating Advanced Placement courses do not reflect schools' general cultural makeup (VanSciver, 2006). One potential solution to this problem is AP open enrollment. Open enrollment seeks to diversify AP programs by specifically targeting minority students with AP potential based on different factors that are unique to the students. These factors may include past academic performance, test scores, recommendations and more.

One program that fully encompasses the idea of open enrollment is AdvanceState. AdvanceState is a statewide math, science and English initiative that began in 2008 to expose high school students, often those who are traditionally underserved and underrepresented, to rigorous Advanced Placement coursework in the state¹. As of February, 2015 there were 8 cohorts participating in the AdvanceState initiative¹. This program gives high school students the opportunity for college credit in AP Science, math and English courses. A total of 101 State public high schools in 74 districts have participated¹. Ongoing longitudinal research conducted by AdvanceState demonstrates that significantly more minority and low-income students who attend AdvanceState schools go to college and enroll in far fewer remedial courses compared to graduates from other public schools. Students participating in this program are closing the gap with performance patterns very similar to their white colleagues¹. While open enrollment may not increase the AP pass rates of the schools that utilize this system, it does offer more diverse and low-income students' exposure to a highly rigorous curriculum that has the potential to create access to college in general and appropriate college level classes,

¹ This citation would show information about the district in which my participants work.

specifically. As a result, AdvanceState can add to the history of the AP program by continually increasing diversity.

It is necessary to explore different ways to help recruit, retain and support minority and low-income students in AP programs. PSCs are in a position to influence these programs to become inclusive for minorities and low-income students and can do so by using creative methods that offer these students the encouragement and support they need to be academically and personally successful. As one can see in Figure 1, there has been change and improvement in the AP program since its inception.

Figure 1.

A History of the Advanced Placement Program

Year	Event
1952	12 Headmasters agree on pilot of AP
1954	1 st AP exams are given
1954-1980	Mostly white students participated in AP which created perceptions of institutional racism
1980s	Disenfranchised students become a focus for advanced placement
1988	140% increase in minority AP participation – 19.5% of all US testers were minority
1994	26.3% of participating students were minority
2013	27% of AP participation is minority (18% of minority testers passed at least one test)

The Importance of the Advanced Placement Program to Student Outcomes

The AP program serves multiple purposes and has many benefits for the students who participate in the program. According to College Board’s website, the benefits of the AP program include the following: college admission advantages, earning college/dual credits and mitigating costs as a result, and college preparation.

The College Board (n.d.) claims that when college admissions officers see that students took AP classes in high school, they perceive this as a signal that those students are well-prepared for college. Students who take AP classes may have more attractive transcripts than those who did not because colleges can see that participating students were willing to challenge themselves more in high school than others. This gives them a clear advantage for students perceived to have challenged themselves during high school.

By passing the AP exam, students can be exempted from introductory general education classes that cost them over \$1,000 at some universities per class. If they pass enough exams during high school, they could even attain enough college credits to skip their first year of college. This opportunity allows families to save a tremendous amount of money that they may otherwise have to pay for college freshman level classes.

The AP program helps high school students gain the skills they need to succeed in college classes. The College Board (n.d.) explains that AP courses prepare high school students for college and give them a taste of what to expect post high school graduation. The hope is that this leads to self-confidence for students who have been exposed to AP. By being exposed to a more rigorous curriculum and participating in these classes with what schools would consider some of their brightest students, AP students have a better opportunity of knowing what to expect and being able to achieve in college.

Lastly, the AP program has the potential to improve students' chances of graduating from college. Dougherty, Mellor, and Jian (2006) considered three questions for their 1st report in their AP series about the relationship between AP enrollment and college graduation. These questions included:

1. Do students in Advanced Placement graduate from college at higher rates than non-AP students?
2. Do students in Advanced Placement graduate from college at higher rates than non-AP students, controlling for the students' observed characteristics and the characteristics of their schools?
3. Do high schools with a higher percentage of students in Advanced Placement have higher college graduation rates of their students who attend college, controlling for the measured characteristics of their schools?

In order to answer these questions, the researchers took longitudinal data from an eighth grade cohort of students, following them through high school graduation in 1998. Dougherty et al. (2006) had data on approximately 70,000 students. They tracked students who not only graduated from high school in 1998 but who also enrolled in a Texas public university. The researchers gave these students five years to graduate from college before recording data.

Dougherty et al. (2006) discovered that exposure to AP led to higher college graduation rates among minority students. In terms of minority data, African Americans who took an AP class and passed the AP exam graduated college at a 43% higher graduation point than African American students who did not take an AP class. African American students who took an AP class but did not pass the AP exam, graduated college at a 27% higher graduation point than African Americans who did not take an AP class. African American students who took an AP course but never took an AP exam graduated college at a 20% higher graduation point than African American students who did not take an AP class. When analyzing data for Latino students, the researchers found that

students who took an AP class and passed the AP exam graduated college at a 46% higher graduation point than Latino students who did not take an AP class. Latino students who took an AP exam but did not pass the AP exam, graduated college at a 21% higher graduation point than Latino students who did not take an AP class. Latino students who took an AP class but never took an AP exam graduated college at a 15% higher graduation point than Latino students who did not take an AP class.

Dougherty, Mellor, and Jian (2006) also analyzed data for low-income students. They found that low-income students who took and passed an AP class graduated college at a 39% higher graduation point than low-income students who did not take an AP class. Low-income students who took an AP class but did not pass the exam graduated college at a 20% higher graduation point than low-income students who did not take an AP class. Low-income students who took an AP class but who never took the correlating AP exam graduated college at a 14% higher graduation point than low-income students who did not take an AP class. While Dougherty et al. added to the literature about the positive outcomes of AP for all students (including minority and low-income), they never talk about how schools can increase their AP enrollment in order to give marginalized students more of a fighting chance to be successful after high school.

Achievement Gap between Caucasian and Minority Students

An achievement gap between minority and majority (Caucasian) students persists (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; The Education Resources Institute, Inc., 2007). As a result, one major goal of educators may be to help minority students find momentum on their chase to catch up to the academic success of their white peers (Allen, 2008). Harper and Associates (2014) state that, “Nationally, 52% of Black

and 58% of Latino males graduated in four years from high schools where they began as ninth graders, compared to 78% of their White male classmates” (p. 6). These disparities and the persistence of these disparities in achievement between white and minority peers is a stubborn problem for schools and districts across the United States. Furthermore, Evans (2011) discusses the achievement gap as a problem for not only our educational system, but also for our economy, our social stability, and ultimately our country.

There are many aspects of education along with the backgrounds of our minority students that explain why an achievement gap exists and persists. Borman et al. (2000) suggest that cultural differences also contribute significantly to the academic performance of minority children in Pre-K-12 schools. There are an abundance of reasons for this including the following: schools often create the perception that in order to be successful, minority students must assimilate to the majority culture. Other factors that may contribute to the achievement gap are the socioeconomic status of minority students, parental support, teacher expectations, relationships with teachers, along with other systemic barriers. There is another potential barrier that has become one of the main purposes of this study. PSCs are in a position to objectively see the systems in their schools that work and ones that do not work. Nunn (2011) states, “If minority students are excluded from or discouraged in their pursuit of advanced, college preparatory academics, their futures will continue to be bleaker than their White counterparts” (p. 1229). With this said, PSCs can give minority students access to their Advanced Placement programs which may ultimately play a role in evening the achievement gap and give minority students equal access to a program that can help them find success in high school and thereafter.

Socioeconomic Status and Race in AP Enrollments

When looking for solutions to improve minority achievement, one must consider factors that contribute to low achievement. Borman (2000) explains that researchers consistently find that minorities are represented disproportionately compared to their white counterparts and when it comes to children living in poverty, they have less access to formal learning opportunities, fewer resources, greater health problems, and development delays, all of which create a negative impact on educational outcomes. Although a low socioeconomic status itself may not be damning, the lack of resources can contribute to the achievement gap between low SES students and high SES counterparts. The American Psychological Association (2015) found a correlation between children's initial reading competence and home literacy environment, number of books owned, and parent distress. They also found that parents from low SES communities may not be able to afford resources such as books, computers, or tutors to create literacy environment which only widens the discrepancy. A lack of resources for low-income houses is a major factor that has implications for a persistent achievement gap. Minority students who are raised poor need help catching up to their Caucasian counterparts to compensate for the lack of resources they have access to at home. Providing access to higher-level courses is one way of helping minority and low-income students reach the same levels of success and opportunity.

Although all minority students do not come from low-income households, black and Latino students are three times more likely to be low-income than Caucasian students. Klopfenstein (2003) states, "Low-income reduces AP participation rates by approximately 40 percent" (p. 16). Klopfenstein came to these conclusions after using

the Texas Schools Microdata Panel (TSMP) for the '98-99 school year. She analyzed data for 738,291 students from over 700 Texas public schools. In her sample, there were 383,043 white students, 255,139 Latino students, and 100,109 African American students. Her primary concern was AP enrollment data based on the backgrounds of students. She discovered information in this study that showed just how disadvantaged low-income students are in terms of Advanced Placement enrollment. She also offered reasons as to why this may be the case. Some of these reasons include the following: more responsibility for low-income students outside of school, diminished access to a culture of learning that establishes expectations for attending college (Klopfenstein, 2003).

Participation in the AP program has many potential benefits for students. Unfortunately, many of the students who participate are privileged and Caucasian. Arguably, some of the students who may need the advantage of taking AP classes do not. The fact is that minority and low-income students make up a small percentage of AP participants. Klopfenstein (2003) concludes that Latino students lack equal access to AP, she finds that a low-income status diminishes the chances of minority and low-income AP participation greater. Klopfenstein does offer schools general ways of improving the participation of minority and low-income students in AP programs but these generalities do not address a certain role group, nor do they offer specific directions. She explains that large high schools can be subdivided into smaller schools within a school or that schools that track students remain flexible in their tracking but she does not proceed to offer ways for schools to accomplish this. Hill (2015) claims that in 2013, 15% of graduating seniors in the United States were African American but only 9% of AP test

takes were represented by this population. Low-income students made up 48% of the nation's schools yet only 28% of AP test takers came from this population (Hill, 2015). These data suggest that minority and low-income students are disadvantaged by a lack of participation in a program that offers academic advantages to students. If all students can benefit from this program and the program allows students the benefit of standing out in college admissions, earning college credits, skipping introductory classes and building college skills, then it is paramount that our students with the most need (namely minority and low-income students) have full access. Conceivably, PSCs are educators in the building who are placed in a prime position to provide this access.

Misperceptions about Minority Student Behavior

There are sometimes confusions about the intelligence of students based on their compliance rather than their academic skills. Nunn (2011) explains that many African American and Latino students are perceived by their teachers as less academically competent than White peers for the simple reason that African American and Latino students do not interact with these authority figures *the right way*. Educators must be careful not to have preconceived notions about students' academic abilities based on student behavior in order for all students to have access to the highest levels of education (Provenzo, Jr., Renaud, & Provenzo, 2009). Statistics suggest that minority students get in more trouble than their white counterparts. For instance, Harper and Associates (2014) explain that around 50% of African American and 30% of Latino male 6-12th graders had been suspended while just about 20% of Caucasian male peers had been suspended. They also claimed that black boys were expelled at a rate 13 times higher than Caucasian boys. These statistics in and of themselves suggest that there is a problem with the

perceptions of minorities and their behaviors. We must ask ourselves, how many of these students miss out on academic opportunities because they are perceived as “bad” or “problems” to educators.

Harper (2015) came to these conclusions after working with 40 public high schools in New York City. He created a team of 12 other minority scholars from Pennsylvania State University. The team asked principals, assistant principals and PSCs to identify African American males who held a 3.0 grade point average or higher who had taken a pre-college curriculum. Eventually, 325 students were interviewed for around 90 minutes each. Also, photographs were taken that counteracted the misperceptions that our society commonly holds about urban schools. These photographs showed young men of color dressed up, smiling, and working with adults who were also black men. Often, young black men are painted with a broad stroke of how they look, act, and dress. This piece showed that this is not always the case. Harper (2015) used an anti-deficit model to show that urban schools and minority students often carry misperceptions on their shoulders. Many of these misperceptions are direct contradictions to the realities of these students. Harper showed motivated, encouraged, excited, passionate African American male students who looked forward to a life of success after high school.

Harper (2015) states:

The near exclusive focus in media, popular discourse, and published research on Black male underperformance, disengagement, and maladaptive behaviors cyclically reinforces a caricature of them that is best described by one of the most

racially derogatory terms in American history: N words. N wording is the process by which stereotypes about Black boys and men shape people's low expectations for their success in schools and society. (p. 163)

In summary, PSCs are well placed for helping put a microscope on student abilities, talents and achievements. They are in a position to see the whole adolescent, communicate with the adolescent and offer access to programs like AP for minority students who may act different, but be adequately gifted to perform well in these courses. Furthermore, PSCs can build the confidence of minority students by encouraging them to participate in programs such as AP. They have the opportunity to expose minority students to potential colleges and universities as well. Harper (2015) states, "Students of color who are exposed to positive messages about themselves, their schools, and their communities often develop healthier identities and higher educational aspirations" (p. 163). PSCs are often the bridge between the child and school, the family and school as well as the community and school. With PSCs actively involved in the success of minority students in so many facets of their lives, these students have much more of an opportunity to find self-confidence and success. While Harper offers a vast array of evidence that black males are more behaved and academically gifted than behavior data often suggests, he does not point to people who can shine a light on these facts and put African American males (along with other minority and low-income students) in positions to hear the positive messages about themselves that are necessary. Furthermore, specific roles or people are not identified in schools that can challenge this population with more rigorous classes which can ultimately help them achieve more

success. My next section will discuss ways for PSCs to work with parents in order to close the achievement gap and support more minority students.

The Influence of Parental Support in Ameliorating the Achievement Gap

Minority and low-income students are less likely to have academic role models at home and often have poorer academic histories and limited (or unrealistic) expectations about future college attendance than their Caucasian and higher income counterparts (Carter, 2013). This factor reduces the likelihood that minority students will pursue an advanced curriculum. A lack of parental support can have devastating effects on one's educational experience. Evidence suggests that certain minorities are at a substantial disadvantage in the schooling process because they are unfamiliar with many functional and navigational skills that are necessary for helping students succeed (Schneider, Martinez, & Ownes, 2006). With a lack of parental support and a lack of knowledge navigating the educational process, parents may simply not know the benefits of AP. As a result, they may not know how to get their children involved and how to support them if they become an AP student.

Harper and Associates (2014) worked with 415 African American and Latino students who had found success in their high schools and were on their way to college. When asked about parental support, most students stated that they had strong support in their homes. Harper and Associates (2014) found that one of the biggest factors for this was that parents believed that their children had more potential to earn higher grades. As a result, these students felt pushed to perform better and were often being reinforced with parents who constantly said that their children were so smart and could achieve more.

Through their study, Harper and Associates (2014) stated, “We met few students who reported that their families cared nothing about education. In fact, most recalled parents and other family members conveying to them at a young age powerful messages about the value of schooling” (p. 15). Harper and Associates (2014) went further to say:

Many parents valued American schooling so much that they traveled far (often without economic stability) so their kids could have access to perceivably better educational opportunities. First generation American students and those who relocated to New York City from different countries around the world reflected extensively on their family members’ thoughts about education. We heard this repeatedly in our interviews with immigrant students: ‘My parents struggled and moved here so that my siblings and I could get a high-quality education’. (p. 15)

PSCs are often the link between the school and parents. Parents look to PSCs when they lack understanding on how to help prepare their students for high school and college. Furthermore, PSCs are often in a position to host events for parents. By explaining the difference between minority and low-income students who have found success and those who do not in these meetings or at these events, PSCs may be in a position to help parents engage their students in meaningful ways that allow them to get stronger results academically. In my next section, I will discuss ways for PSCs to continue connecting support systems to minority students in AP by showing the impact of high expectations and positive relationships for minority students.

The Power of High Expectations and Relationships

Being able to recruit, support and retain minority students in Advanced Placement programs is dependent on educators having high expectations and holding students accountable for their academia. With this said, high expectations are paramount for the success of minority students and low-income students (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2009). At the school level, educators must know the impact that the expectations can have on students. Educators must also be aware of the detrimental impacts of low expectations on minority and low-income children.

Research shows that educators have to be very deliberate about showing high expectations at all times. Students have the ability to rise or fall to perceived expectations (Payne, 2008; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2009; The Education Resources Institute, Inc., 2007). Payne (2008) claims that demanding behavior signifies one's membership in the larger moral community, however, kids may enjoy an undemanding environment if they can get it. If educators can be consistent in holding students accountable with high expectations, they are on their way to molding successful minority and low-income students. Professional School Counselors may be perfectly suited for this role because they often work with students on graduation plans and school schedules. If PSCs can be demanding in these scenarios with minority and low-income students, they may very well be able to create the impact needed to help minority students find success in high school and post high school graduation.

PSCs must communicate the importance of minority students and students from low socioeconomic households in AP classes to school stakeholders, families and

teachers. If stakeholders, families and teachers are not on board with this plan, there is a grave possibility that minority and low-income students will continue to face low expectations. When this happens, these students and their success may suffer. Jensen (2009) says, “We have high expectations of all kids, but sometimes we expect too little—especially of children raised in poverty” (p. 112). Payne (2009) expands on this and says, “We should think of teacher expectations as a stratifying device in themselves, a major part of the machinery by which social inequality is reproduced” (p. 112). PSCs are charged with bringing this information to the forefront of their staffs’ minds so staffs realize that they have the power to either create successful AP classrooms where minorities contribute a great deal or marginalizing classrooms that continue to deprive minority students of the learning they need. To end, Jensen (2009) explains that hopeful students try harder, persist longer, and ultimately get better grades. Students perform better when educators believe in them. Conversely, when educators believe that students have deficits, students tend to perform poorly.

Teacher expectations of students play a large role in their success. By analyzing data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Education Longitudinal Study, which followed the progression of a nationally representative sample of 10th grade students from 2002 to 2012, Boser, Wilhelm, and Hanna (2014), found several data points about how expectations affect students. According to Boser et al., (2014), “High school students whose teachers have higher expectations about their future success are far more likely to graduate from college” (para. 4). With minority and low-income students, we can easily see how these high expectations are necessary for their progress especially because they have so much stacked against them. Unfortunately, this need is not

reinforced by reality. Boser, et al. (2014) state, “Secondary teachers have lower expectations for students of color and students from disadvantaged backgrounds” (para. 5). When we consider the fact that high expectations can be the main driver of academic success, the students who may need to make the biggest gains are met with the lowest expectations. This is an ultimate barrier for minority and low-income students and a major reason for why PSCs should step in and advocate for these students by recruiting, retaining, and supporting them in socially just AP programs. Finally, Boser, et al. (2014) claim that students who have more rigorous academic opportunities and experiences are more likely to succeed academically. As a result, the researchers found that there was a direct correlation between expectations and success.

Teacher relationships are paramount to the success of all students and extremely important to the needs of minority and low-income students. According to Ferguson (2012), teacher-student relationships are important factors for raising achievement and narrowing achievement gaps. In order for there to be strong relationships between teachers and this population, cultural competence is necessary in schools along with a strong desire to connect with these students. When teachers do not do this, negative effects occur. Ferguson (2012) goes further to explain that students who feel that their teacher is uncaring, incompetent, inconsistent, too controlling, or disrespectful are not apt to go to that teacher for help and have mixed emotions about him/her. Ferguson (2012) also claims that teachers who feel disconnected from a class or student may send signals that they are unwilling to provide help to their students. Teacher relationships can either greatly help or hurt minority and low-income students. Counselors can help teach teachers cultural competence and show the realities of teacher relationships with minority

and low-income students in order to help teachers gain clarity on how the perceptions of their students have of them correlate to achievement.

The Role of PSCs in Increasing AP Diversity

While there have been several pushes by College Board and other organizations to recruit minority and low-income students with “AP Potential”, the divide between Caucasian and minority (specifically African American and Latino) continues. Handwerk et al. (2008) explains that while the AP program is a means of introducing students to academic rigor, their data show that a small percentage of high school students, mostly consisting of majority group and Asian American students, participate in the program. Klopfenstein (2003) goes further to say, “Black and Latino high school students enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) courses at approximately half the rate of white students” (p. 1). If we know that a gap exists and we know that Advanced Placement courses are a way of positively influencing this gap, more must be done to get minority and low-income students enrolled, retained and supported in AP programs. This is where PSCs can come in for these students. Ford et al. (2008) say, “The underrepresentation problem is a result of both recruitment barriers and retention barriers” (p. 302). By focusing on these areas, PSCs can use innovative methods to close the achievement gap and support minority and low-income students.

There are many concerns about how students are identified as having AP potential within schools. Ford (1998) states that, “The concerns over recruiting and retaining minority students in gifted education programs have persisted for several decades” (p. 4). Often, students are recruited for AP based on teacher referrals. According to Ford et al.

(2008), “The teacher referral process contributes significantly to underrepresentation of diverse learners in gifted education.” This is another barrier for minority and low-income students. If the people making the decisions on who should and should not be in AP programs are teachers who may not have a social justice agenda, minorities and low-income may be left out more often than not. Barnard-Brak, McGaha-Garnett, and Burley (2011) identified a need for better ways of identifying students for AP coursework, including a need for culturally sensitive placement instruments. When PSCs become the leads for AP recruitment, new systems can be created that will reach a more diverse population. These systems can be created with the specific needs, populations and goals of the school in mind.

It is not enough to recruit minority and low-income students for AP classes. Working towards keeping these students in the program is yet another task that PSCs must focus their energy towards. In order to do this, PSCs must understand the mindset of the students with which they serve. According to VanSciver (2006), students want to please their parents and often feel that they can do this by getting good grades. As a result, students will often under schedule themselves or try to find the easiest and most direct strategies in which they can attain good grades, thus avoiding enrollment in AP courses for what are perceived as short-term gains.

There are several ways PSCs can combat traditional AP programs by diversifying them. PSCs must address low expectations and the idea that minorities are not good enough in order to help retain them in AP classes (Ford et al., 2008). Higher expectations for minorities should also impact decisions, behaviors, and practices for these students. There are several interventions and incentives that PSCs should consider in order to keep

minority and low-income students in AP programs. Holstead, Spradlin, McGillivray, and Burroughs (2010) discuss state and federal incentive programs for schools that are willing to work towards the goal of AP diversity. Holstead et al. (2010) goes further to discuss scholarship programs in several states that reward student success on AP exams. By considering these interventions and incentives, PSCs have a stronger chance of retaining minority and low-income students in AP programs.

PSCs must acknowledge the many barriers that exist for minority and low-income students and act as social justice agents (Ohrt, Lambie, & Leyva, 2009). Many of these barriers are systemic and underlying. By understanding that teaching heterogeneous AP classes may be more difficult than teaching homogeneous classes, PSCs can support minorities and low-income students. They accomplish this by building cultural competence in their teachers, for example. School support is extremely important and it continues to have a significant impact on student involvement (Barnard-Brak et al., 2007). Ohrt et al. (2009) follows this line of thinking by claiming that PSCs have the ability to create comprehensive programs to reduce barriers and support students in their holistic development. By identifying those potential barriers and creating systems and interventions that break those obstacles down, minorities and low-income students can get equal access to AP. The result of this work can be that minority and low-income students have much more of an opportunity for success in AP classes and programs.

The Role of Professional School Counselors in Supporting Minority/Poverty in AP Programs

Professional School Counselors should see themselves as social justice change agents in schools (Bemark & Chung, 2005). As social justice agents, PSCs are in a position to successfully help minority and low-income students succeed in high school and beyond. Ohrt et al. (2009) states, “PSCs are in a unique position to address the academic, career, and personal/social needs of all students including those who are traditionally underserved” (para. 8). If PSCs can get specific, straightforward ways to help recruit, retain and support minority and low-income students in Advanced Placement programs, schools may see higher minority enrollment, more academic success, and higher college admissions for minority students among many other benefits.

Prior to my research, broad suggestions/solutions (outside of College Board) have been given to schools on how they can close the divide between AP participants. One example of this is through the work of Handdwerk, Tognatta, Coley and Gitomer (2008) who claim that in order for more students to reap the benefits of AP, schools need to do more to broaden their programs and create an “AP culture” within schools. Claims like this are helpful in that they give broad solutions that can be interpreted and then implemented in multiple ways. Unfortunately, broad statements create broad ideas for practitioners. An equally broad solution to schools is offered by Ornelas and Solorzano (2014) who claim that schools must ensure that all students have equal access to AP and that these classes are proportionate to the school population. To truly influence and change the divide, Advanced Placement programs in schools need real world methods

and point people in charge to oversee these changes. PSCs can use their social justice agenda to create solutions to this problem.

In the past, researchers have quantitatively studied minority and low-income students in Advanced Placement programs. Ford et al. (2008) used surveys about enrollment (provided by the US Department of Education) in order to prove that an underrepresentation of minority students drastically exists and then offered schools different ways to recruit and retain students based on their findings. Handwerk et al. (2008) also used data from the US Department of Education combined with data from College Board to answer their research questions. They considered school size, locale and socioeconomic status to answer questions about the availability of the AP program in public schools, the number of students who participate in AP, and how many students pass an AP exam making them eligible for college credit.

Critical Race Theory's Role in Understanding and Addressing Educational Inequality

Critical Race Theory (CRT) came about in the 1970s after several activists, lawyers, and legal scholars felt that the efforts of the civil rights era had stalled (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). Specifically, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman began writing through this theoretical lens in a direct response to traditional approaches that were not improving the educational experiences and outcomes of minority youths and their families (Ladson-Billings, 2010). This framework began as a way to critique the slow pace and unrealized promise of Civil Rights legislation (Yosso, 2005). There was a missing piece, however, which was the marginalization and discrimination of minorities who felt that their gendered, classed, sexual, immigrant, and language experiences and histories were being

silenced (Yosso, 2005). As a result, CRT had to move from a binary disposition to a framework that looked at and considered stances on oppression beyond the Black/White binary and more towards the intersection of oppression of minorities. There are five major tenets of Critical Race Theory that include the following: (1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (2) the challenge to dominant ideology, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) the interdisciplinary perspective (Solarzano, 1998; Yosso, 2005; Delgado-Bernal, 2002).

The premise of CRT is that racism does not only exist under certain circumstances or in certain areas of the United States, but that it is a normal part of American life that exists almost everywhere (Ladson-Billings, 2010). CRT is a theoretical framework connected to education because one component of it looks at the sustained inequities that exist for minorities within the walls of schools and tries to bring them to light (Ladson-Billings, 2010). Ornelas (2014) further explains that CRT is different from other frameworks because it challenges traditional paradigms and offers a liberatory and transformative method when examining racial, gender, and class discrimination. Indeed, it challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practiced subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Delgado-Bernal, 2002).

As aforementioned, CRT deeply considers the centrality and intersection of race and racism. Delgado Bernal (2002) explains that critical raced-gendered epistemologies emerge from the experiences a person of color might have at the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and other oppressions. In other words, CRT considers any form of oppression sustained by minorities and looks for ways to liberate the victims of this

oppression. Oppression for minorities may look very different based on the individualities of the victims (victims could be male or female, Latino, Native American, Asian American, African American, etc.). CRT does not ignore one system of oppression over another.

Another purpose of CRT is to explore the ways that race-neutral laws and policies perpetuate racial and/or ethnic and gender subordination (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). By doing this, CRT challenges the dominant ideologies that put minorities on the same playing field as Whites while ignoring the subjugation that these minorities have withstood for hundreds of years. One example of this is meritocracy. Delgado-Bernal (2002) states, “Those who believe that our society is truly a meritocratic one find it difficult to believe that men gain advantage from women’s’ disadvantages or that Euro Americans have any significant advantage over people of color” (111). Two distinct examples of meritocracy directly connect to this research. The dominant ideology in terms of Advanced Placement entrance along with college admissions is that students get opportunities to participate based on merit. This ignores the fact that meritocracy often disadvantages minorities and further advantages whites (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Specifically, if Advanced Placement programs only enroll students because of test scores and strong grades, we know that less minorities will participate because of the achievement gap. Similarly, less minorities will get accepted to the college of their choice because they may not have achieved equally to their white counterparts (often because they lacked the same opportunities to be challenged). As a result, other measures should be in place to gauge the entrance opportunity metrics for these systems.

My research is designed around a program within education (AP) that traditionally marginalizes minority students by restricting entrance. This research calls for PSCs to create social justice in their schools and programs. This theoretical framework (CRT) will serve as a way for PSCs to liberate minority and low-income students by finding ways to give them access to a program that has the potential to help them achieve in high school and in their post-secondary options. This research also exposes the fact that minority children are overwhelmingly the recipients of low teacher expectations, and consequently, put in low-level classes (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Finally, CRT brings value to the cultural and familial background of students. It challenges educators to seek to find how cultural knowledge contributes to the educational success of some students and it asks the educational institutions to respond to this accordingly (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). As a way of emphasizing the centrality of experiential knowledge, this theoretical framework also takes cultural wealth into consideration. Our society and schools do not acknowledge the fact that minority and low-income students bring with them various forms of capital nurtured through cultural wealth that include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital. Instead, according to Yosso (2005), the assumption follows that People of Color often lack the social and cultural capital for social mobility. I would also add that this is the case for low-income families. The social and cultural capital that are lacking often deal with access to information that can help traditionally marginalized groups get on equal footing to White or middle to upper class families. According to Yosso (2005), “The dominant groups within society are able to maintain power because access is limited to acquiring and learning strategies to use these forms of capital for social mobility” (76). If minority

and low-income families lack access to information, the children (students) may very well lose opportunities that can help them succeed in school and thus, in life.

One form of contemporary racism in US schools is deficit thinking. Deficit thinking occurs when schools believe that minority families are at fault because their students enter schools without the normative cultural knowledge and skills needed and that parents do not value their child's education (Yosso, 2005). This line of thinking assumes that because the students and their families do not possess knowledge deemed by dominant culture as valuable, they are underachievers who have less knowledge than is needed to be successful. Deficit thinking by schools also ignores the knowledge and skills that these students bring to the classroom and acts as if a whole new set of acceptable knowledge that adheres to the dominant culture is needed. One of the goals of CRT is to bring to light the various forms of cultural wealth that minority students carry to the classroom from their homes and communities. There is a commitment to developing schools that acknowledge the multiple strengths of the students in order to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice (Yosso, 2005).

Another form of contemporary racism in US schools is through microaggressions. Microaggressions are much different from macroaggressions. Macroaggressions are the overt and obvious forms of racism, discrimination, and oppression that we see throughout history and contemporary times to minority students and families. Microaggressions, however, are often seen and heard by minorities but not as overt. Solarzano (1998) explains microaggressions as the chief vehicle for proracist behaviors. He goes on to describe microaggressions as subtle, stunning, often automatic and non-verbal put downs to minorities (Solarzano, 1998). As mentioned, microaggressions are often seen, heard,

and observed by minority students and their families from schools. Solorzano (1998) states, “Perhaps the cumulative impact of racial and gender microaggressions at each point in the educational system is further evidence of the very different road that scholars of color must travel and the strength they must have to overcome both macro- and micro-barriers along that road” (132). CRT hopes to liberate students by bringing to the attention of educators what micro and macro-aggressions are in order to help prevent these forms of racism and oppression from continuing to burden minority students.

According to Solorzano (1998), CRT has an interdisciplinary perspective in education because it challenges a historicism and most analyses of race and racism by considering both the present and past of race and racism using interdisciplinary methods. CRT draws on scholarship from ethnic studies (including LatCrit), women’s studies, sociology, history, law, psychology, film, theatre, and other fields (Yosso, 2005). As a result, there is not one path nor scholarship to achieving the goals of CRT. Many disciplines can take part in achieving social justice through Critical Race Theory.

Summary of Literature Review Findings

There are many factors that are relevant to creating access to AP programs for minority and low-income students. As PSCs try to remove barriers for minorities and low-income students so that they can succeed academically, there are many things they must consider. This research project sheds light on themes that help or hinder minority and low-income students who may participate or already participate in AP. By offering research on methods PSCs can use to ameliorate the achievement gap and increase diversity in AP programs, I laid the foundation for PSCs to begin considering the many

factors that go into building a diverse AP program. I also showed them barriers to the success of the children they are trying to liberate through this process. My ultimate goal with this study is to provide PSCs with research-based factors that impact the recruitment, retention and support of minority and low-income students in AP programs and offer them tangible ways to diversify their AP programs. While the list of phenomena PSCs must consider in order to create access for minority and low-income students is extensive, this knowledge will help equip PSCs with strategies that can help them achieve their goal of providing access.

While the aforementioned studies, among others, offer useful information, this study is different from the current literature in several ways. This research is approached narrowly with PSCs in mind. This automatically creates an emphasis on specific change agents in a school building. Next, it considers multiple perspectives from Professional School Counselors who have impacted their schools' Advanced Placement Programs. Finally, this study will take the steps that have been recommended by multiple counselors along with systems mentioned in the literature to create a resource for counselors to use for recruiting, retaining and supporting minority students for their AP programs. This resource will be based on cumulative data points collected from multiple sources. This study also considers some inequities in education that impact minority and low-income students. This will give us a clearer sense of obstacles faced by minority and low-income students and how PSCs can help be a part of the solution by creating social justice for them.

In Chapter 3, I will further discuss CRT and the research design for this study. I will also discuss the methods used to identify the study's informants, select the sites and

the sampling procedures used. Finally, I will discuss how I will protect the participants, collect and analyze the data, and ensure my outcomes are ethical and valid.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover the ways that Professional School Counselors remove barriers to minority and low-income students' enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Creswell (1998) says the following about qualitative research:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

This study utilizes qualitative investigatory methods that allow for the collection of data that seeks to improve our understanding of how school counselors remove barriers and provide greater access to Advanced Placement for minority and low-income students. One potential outcome of this study is that PSCs will be offered specific steps and procedures that they can use to recruit, retain and support minority and low-income students in their AP programs.

Creswell (2008) explains that there are several broad types of qualitative inquiry which include the following: Narrative research (researcher studies the lives of individuals and works to decode stories from their lives), phenomenological research (researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants), grounded theory (researcher derives a general, abstract theory

of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants), ethnography (research studies the behaviors, language or activity of a cultural group in their natural setting), case studies (researchers develop an in depth analysis of a case bounded by time and activity). I propose to use a phenomenological case study design as I will be considering the lived experiences of Professional School Counselors. I will specifically be looking at how they recruit, retain, and support African American, Latino, and low-income students to Advanced Placement programs.

In this chapter, I will discuss Critical Race Theory as my theoretical framework. I will also discuss the use of case studies and phenomenology as components of qualitative work in general and my rationale for choosing to conduct a phenomenological case study as part of this research specifically. The conceptual framework for my research will also be discussed so the reader has a clear idea of where I started and where I am going with this study. In this chapter, I will also discuss how I identified the PSCs that would be studied and my interview protocol. I will conclude this chapter with my process for collecting and analyzing the data from my interviews.

Critical Race Theory

The theory utilized in this research study is Critical Race Theory (CRT). By using this theoretical framework, the researcher will gain access to narratives produced by practicing PSCs in interviews that will ultimately open the readers' eyes to underlying barriers which hold minority students back from enrolling in or staying in AP classes. By finding themes from the narratives produced in semi-structured interviews with current PSCs, I suggest an approach for recruiting, retaining, and supporting minority and

low-income students for AP programs that PSCs can use at their own schools in order to liberate these students. This approach can be utilized by other educational leaders as well. Finally, there are implications for graduate school programs so they can better prepare future PSCs and other educational leaders to create unique strategies that embrace and give access to their minority and low-income students. Scholars working with CRT emphasize experiential knowledge of people of color in order to challenge common assumptions about meritocracy and neutrality that are often camouflaged for the interests of dominant groups (Gilborn, 2015). CRT is also used within this field to examine racism and educational inequity (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

CRT applies to this study by giving me an opportunity to question the norm—which is that most AP programs are not diverse—while providing solutions on how to incorporate more minority and low-income students in these programs. According to Howard and Navarro (2016), there are five major tenets to CRT. These are: centralizing race and racism which includes intersections with other marginalized groups based on sex, class, and citizenship, challenging the dominant perspective, a commitment to a social justice agenda, a value of experiential knowledge centering around narratives, and being interdisciplinary by reflecting multiple perspectives in the research (Howard & Navarro, 2016). This study is centered around the marginalization of minority and low-income students with limited access to Advanced Placement classes and programs, it seeks to find a way to create more access for these students (social justice), it values the experience of the PSCs who are working hard to liberate minority and low-income students by finding unique ways to grant them access to AP and it will include narratives from multiple subjects.

Case Study

Case studies are ways for researchers to understand complex social phenomena in order to retain a holistic and real-world perspective (Yin, 2014). There are three different types of case studies which are as follows: intrinsic (where the case is studied for its own sake), instrumental (where the case is studied to understand issues related to the case or phenomena of interest), and collective (where the single case is extended to include several cases) (Rosenberg & Yates, 2007). My research is considered a collective case study. This is because I am interviewing PSCs in their natural environments (their schools) about their AP programs (the phenomena). I will be collecting data from multiple cases, providing detailed descriptions of each case and then presenting the themes from the cases as potential solutions for PSCs so that they can create systems to recruit, retain, and support minorities in their AP programs. The unit of analysis for this qualitative case study design is interviews with the director of PSCs and five currently practicing PSCs.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that was created by German philosopher Edmund Husserl. It seeks to document and discuss the implicit structure and meaning of human experience (Sanders, 1982). It is an opportunity for researchers to truly understand the experiences of their subjects. There are varying ways of interpreting this approach. According to Finlay (2012), researchers that use a phenomenological approach strive for fresh, complex, rich description of phenomena as concretely lived by asking questions such as what kind of experience is the subject going through and how

can I remove my own understanding of the world in order to better understand my subject's world or experiences? There is a major concept within phenomenology that one must break from their familiar acceptance of the world in order to see the world through the lens of the subject(s) being interviewed qualitatively (Findlay, 2012). The ability to do this is known as a transcendental reduction, otherwise known as epoche (Findlay, 2012). By bracketing one's knowledge of the world, they can better understand the existence of the phenomena being studied.

I am utilizing phenomenology in this research to consider subjective perspectives of PSCs that challenge recommendations or past practices of people who have attempted to recruit, retain and support minority and low-income students in AP programs. By doing this, I can identify and compile procedures that current PSCs use in order for future PSCs to put into practice. This method will allow me to comprehend the unique practices that the PSCs being studied have put into place in order to create diverse AP programs and offer a practical system for future PSCs to utilize.

Rationale for Using Phenomenological Case Study

As mentioned, this research is a qualitative study that utilizes a phenomenological case study approach. Case study research is a methodologically flexible research design that considers thorough investigations of particular, real-life situations (Rosenberg & Yates, 2007). The benefits of case studies are that they are generally the preferred strategies when how or why questions are being posed (Yin, 2014). For this research, the researcher is considering the need for diversifying AP programs and how PSCs are able to accomplish this. By interviewing 5 PSCs, I will have an opportunity to gain a clearer

understanding of systems that work in the recruitment, retention, and support of minority and low-income students.

Phenomenological research focuses on the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants (Creswell, 2014). Using a phenomenological approach allows the researcher to better comprehend the unique experiences and systems of practicing PSCs who successfully recruit, retain, and support minority and low-income students in AP programs.

Conceptual Framework

The design of this study was guided by a conceptual framework that outlines key factors for PSCs to consider when creating a diverse AP program that includes students from low-income households (See Figure 2). My conceptual framework is based on a synthesis of concepts and perspectives drawn from many sources that will allow me to

fully get to the root of my research question (Imenda, 2014).

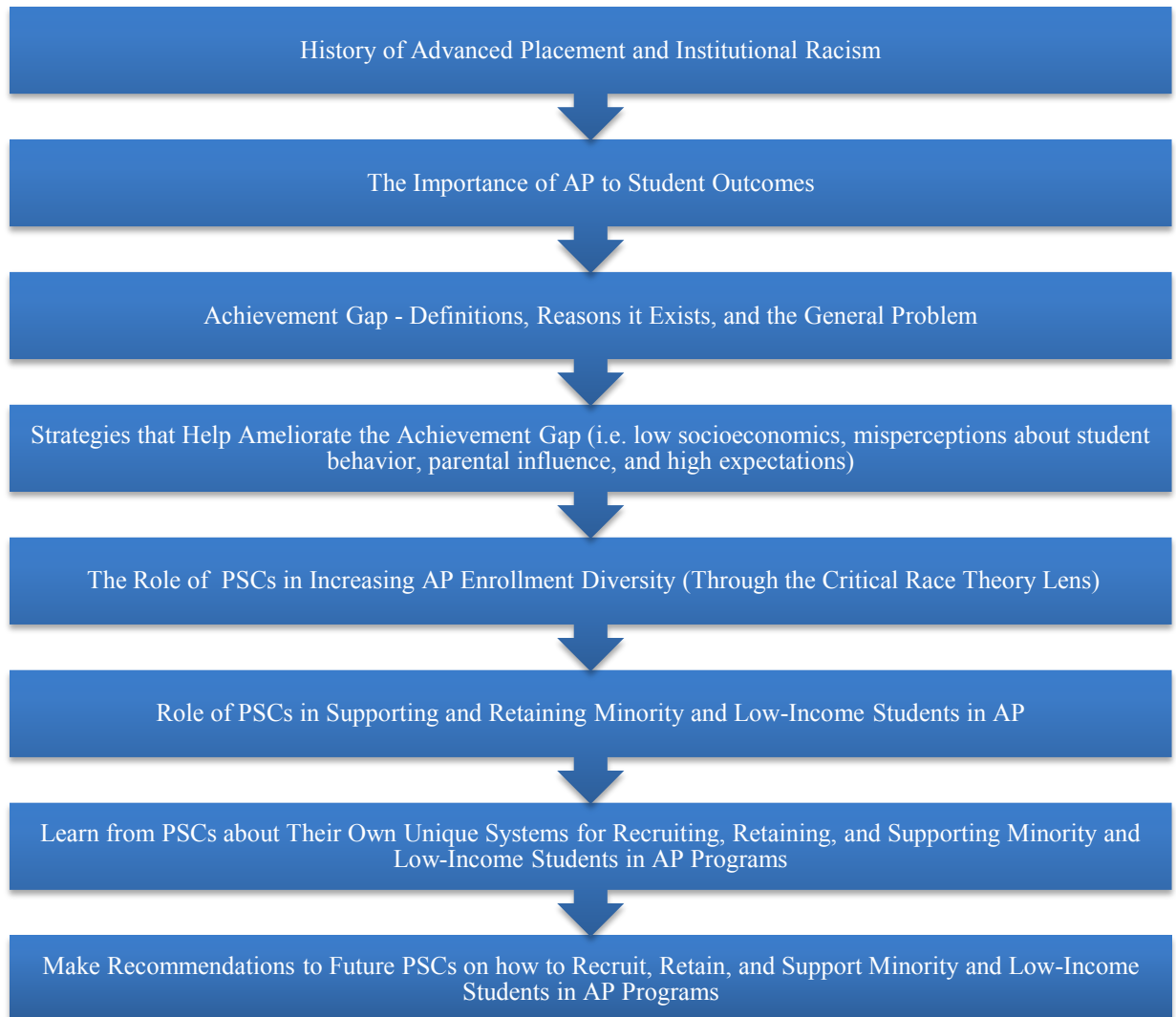


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for the Recruitment, Retention, and Support of Diverse Learners in AP Programs

These factors include a history of institutional racism when it comes to diverse learners, the importance of AP to student outcomes, an achievement gap between Caucasian and minority students as well as a gap between learners of middle and high-income students versus low-income students. Next, this study explores strategies that ameliorate the achievement gap, the role of PSCs in increasing diversity in AP enrollment, and their role in supporting and retaining minority and low-income students

in AP programs. I also consider traditional AP enrollment versus open AP enrollment, the role of PSCs in supporting minority and low-income students in AP programs and Critical Race Theory. Finally, I explore the systems that five unique PSCs use to recruit, retain, and support minority and low-income students in AP programs and then analyze the data in order to make recommendations to future PSCs trying to accomplish the same goals.

District Context

The district in which my interviews took place is a large urban school district in the southeast region of the United States. This district was chosen for several reasons. First, there is a large number of PSCs at the elementary, middle and high school levels. This allows me to seek out PSCs that have unique perspectives with diversifying AP programs from among large population with varying levels of commitment and success in expanding AP offerings to students of color. This also allowed me to have an opportunity to report my findings to the school district and make recommendations for impactful change. Finally, with such a large group of schools within this school district, I will have an opportunity to target highly diverse schools in order to suggest strategies to current and future pre-service PSCs.

Identifying Informants

My sampling strategy began with discussing my research question and goals with the director of PSCs from the large urban school district in the Southeast that served as the context for my study. I interviewed the director in order to better understand her perspective on this issue. Specifically, I wanted to know how she views the recruitment,

retention, and support of minority and low-income students and to see if she has knowledge of currently practicing PSCs within the district that she serves that utilize unique practices to accomplish this goal. Next, I asked her to identify five PSCs who have worked on diversifying their AP programs. After speaking to this director, I contacted the identified counselors to gauge their interest in participating in the study.

A small number of cases (five) were selected in order to deeply look at each individual's context and to create a depth of understanding (Creswell, 2013). Although the nature of a small study does not allow for generalizability, the purpose of the research focuses primarily on gaining insights into a few extreme cases (Yin, 2013). The sample size chosen for this study will allow me to consider the methods used by practicing PSCs in the recruitment, retention, and support of minority and low-income students while also creating opportunities for the researcher to offer a tangible system to future PSCs.

Participant Confidentiality

The researcher is responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of participant identity, particularly for qualitative studies in which participants are divulging information about their personal lives and experiences. Kaiser (2009) states, "Qualitative researchers face a conflict between conveying detailed, accurate accounts of the social world and protecting the identities of the individuals who participated in their research" (p. 1632). In order to keep participant names confidential, I used pseudonyms throughout this study. Interviews were digitally recorded and then secured on a password-protected computer along with transcriptions of those interviews. Prior to conducting any interviews, I secured permission from the school district in which my participants work.

Each participant received a letter of consent for this research project as well (See Appendix A).

Data Collection

In this study, I used narrative inquiry. Narratives are valuable as data because they create a form in which to examine race, class and other themes. This offers the researcher the ability to articulate what the subject is truly feeling (Graham, Brown-Jeffy, Aronson & Stephens, 2011). The use of narrative inquiry connects to Critical Race Theory (Martin, 2014). Martin (2014) explains that narrative research portrays experience in order to question common understandings. It also paints pictures and inspires the reader to question phenomena and question our understandings of the world. Narratives bring together reason and emotion. By considering the narratives of the 5 PSCs that I interviewed, I was able to use their stories to paint the picture of how to create more access, more support, and higher retention levels of minority and low-income students in AP programs and the positive outcomes that this access creates.

Not only does narrative inquiry connect to CRT along with bringing together reason and emotion, but it also allows the reader to make decisions about what he/she reads in this research. Through the narratives that my participants offer, readers of this research (including future PSCs) will have the ability to make choices on what will and will not work in their practices. They (the readers) become sense makers of the information presented and they ultimately pick and choose what that can implement in their own practices in terms of recruiting, retaining, and supporting minority and low-income students in AP programs.

Through narrative inquiry, I am also able to express my own stories during my semi-structured interviews with my participants in order to glean richer data. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narrative inquiry is a collaborative effort between the researcher and practitioner. While I will not be quoting myself or inserting my own dialogue into the chapters that follow, certainly a portion of my experience will have worked its way into the inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Connelly & Clandinin (1990) stated the following:

And in our storytelling, the stories of our participants merged with our own to create new stories, ones that we have labelled collaborative stories. The thing finally written on paper, the research paper or book, is a collaborative document; a mutually constructed story created out of the lives of both researcher and participant. (p. 12)

I utilized an in depth semi-structured interview protocol (See Appendix B) with 5 PSCs and the central office administrator responsible for PSCs across a large urban school district in order to better understand their lived experiences of being counselor advocates for increasing the racial and socio-economic diversity of students who participated (or are currently participating) in Advanced Placement classes. Each PSC was offered an opportunity to choose the location of their face-to-face interview in order to ensure that the interview location was comfortable and private. In so doing, I sought to improve the quality of the data collected.

The semi-structured interview protocol provided an opportunity for the informants to address questions while also providing a modicum of flexibility for the

informant to address issues that might not otherwise be asked in the protocol. Prior to the interview, the PSCs were given the interview protocol so that they could review the questions and begin considering how they will answer them. At the time of the interviews, I digitally recorded the interviews and the responses were transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data were coded and themes were identified (see Chapter 4). Data were analyzed using Critical Race Theory. By approaching this research through the lens of Critical Race Theory, I listened to the narratives as they occurred and read the transcribed narratives in order to interpret the stories of PSCs who use a social justice approach to design and implement systems and strategies for helping minority and low-income students achieve. These PSCs recognized a problem with access for students of color and low-income students and chose to help liberate these students through increased access to AP and the opportunities and knowledge these courses avail to participants. I carefully considered the perspectives of the subjects in order to inform interpretation and meaning designation (Graham, Brown-Jeffy, Aronson & Stephens, 2011). Furthermore, by approaching this research through the lens of CRT, I recognize that narrative is valuable as data because it details the subject's life experiences, perspectives, and feelings. Stories always refer to a particular context, place, and moment, which are critical to a researcher's interpretation of the fact, feelings, and understandings. A premium is placed on perspectivalism which is the belief that a person's or group's standpoint influences how they see truth and reality.

Data becomes clearer through phenomenological data analysis, when the researcher continuously reflects on the phenomena being studied from multiple angles (Moustakas, 1994). By transcribing and then coding the interviews that were undertaken with these five PSCs, I was afforded an opportunity to arrive at the essence of what outlier PSCs believe are some of the most meaningful and powerful ways to diversify AP programs. I use inductive coding in this research study (Graham et al., 2011). Inductive analysis considers approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to interpret concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made by the researcher (Thomas, 2011). Structural and descriptive coding will be used to analyze data in first and second cycle coding in this research. Structural coding is a questioning-style coding method used to categorize data associated with broad themes (Saldana, 2009). Structural coding both codes and initially categorizes the data (Saldana, 2009). Descriptive coding allowed me to put each passage from interviews into a broad category based on the topic (not the content) that the interviewee presents (Saldana, 2009). By using first cycle coding, I specifically used in vivo coding in order to attune myself to participant language, perspectives, and worldview (Saldana, 2009). This allowed me to ascertain broad themes from the interviews that gave me a clearer picture of ideas central to the PSCs in recruiting, retaining, and supporting minority and low-income students to their AP programs. By utilizing second cycle coding, I was able to look closer at the emerging themes and ideas from the participant interviews and began to draw conclusions from them. My research was an iterative process that was constantly evolving. I used NVIVO qualitative software for coding in order to pull out these themes from my interviews as I performed first and second cycle coding.

In this qualitative, phenomenological case study, cross-case analysis was used to pull out significant themes from the data. By considering all six participant interviews, I was able to identify themes that may help new or current counselors implement a system that will better allow them to recruit, retain and support minority and low-income students to AP programs. This system may also help future graduate level programs who teach future educational leaders understand how to create systems of equity and diversity. Phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning, and the development of essence description (Creswell, 2008).

Analytic Memoing

Along with coded interviews, I utilized analytic memos in order to add to the research. These memos are conversations with ourselves about our data (Saldana, 2009) that may include notes taken by the researcher during interviews, conversations with University of Louisville faculty members, observations, document analysis, emerging data and in collaboration with capstone group members. The memos written in this research study allowed the researcher to come back to and expand upon key components throughout the research.

Trustworthiness

There are four key components that researchers must consider in order to ensure that their qualitative research is trustworthy. According to (Guba, 1981) these components include the following: Truth Value (how can the researcher ensure that the truth is being told throughout the research and in the findings), Applicability (the researcher must be able to apply the findings to multiple contexts or subjects),

Consistency (the researcher should be able to show that his/her findings would be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated, and Neutrality (the researcher should be able to show that his/her own biases did not convolute the findings). To ensure trustworthiness in this study, various strategies were employed including triangulation through member checking, ethical issues, and exploring researcher positionality.

Triangulation. According to Merriam (1995), triangulation of data uses multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings. Merriam (1995) also notes that by triangulating data, the researcher will know if the findings are reliable and valid. Reliability seeks to find the extent to which one's findings will be found again and validity seeks to find the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 1995). The researcher triangulated the data in order to create a viable system for recruiting, retaining and supporting minority and low-income students in Advanced Placement programs for other PSCs to utilize. By coding interviews from five practicing PSCs, I was able to examine evidence and build a coherent justification for themes (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) states, "If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study" (p. 201). Qualitative inquiry is based on an interpretation of what informants state and feel during interviews. In order for there to be no misinterpretations of the lived experiences of the five PSCs and one Director of PSCs being interviewed, my subjects were offered an opportunity to read through the transcripts of our interviews along with my final report in order to ensure that my interpretation of their statements, feelings, and experiences were accurate (Creswell, 2014). By offering my informants the opportunity to read through my data, they had an

opportunity to identify and correct any inaccuracies that were found. This process is referred to as member checking.

Researcher Positionality

As a practicing Professional School Counselor with six years of experience, I have worked on recruiting, retaining, and supporting minority and low-income students in AP programs. I am interviewing fellow PSCs about their own systems which can, in and of itself, create biases. After working on the problems detailed throughout this research project, my positionality may impact my perceptions of the interviewed Professional School Counselors' systems. Furthermore, I am an African American male interviewing PSCs and the director of PSCs about liberating people that come from my cultural background. In order to be open to others and their ideas, I must work to pursue a deeper racial and cultural knowledge about myself and the community of people I study (Milner, 2007). I will present this research and work with my participants knowing that my different roles and experience are embedded in the process and outcomes of education research (Milner, 2007). An expanded discussion of research positionality will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Summary

This research is unique in that it specifies change agents to diversify AP programs by recruiting, retaining and supporting minority and low-income students. It also offers PSCs a system that they can cater to their own populations. This research has the potential to offer PSCs unique and innovative approaches to a problem that has persisted for far too long. Finally, this research seeks to offer PSCs ways to help minority and

low-income students overcome long-standing barriers and navigate the educational process.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to answer the following research question: How do school counselors remove barriers for culturally diverse and low-income students by recruiting, retaining and supporting them in Advanced Placement (AP) courses? Using a critical analysis framework based upon Critical Race Theory, this study explores how five currently practicing PSCs and one Director of School Counselors implement practices that allow more minority and low-income students to participate in AP programs. Through narrative inquiry, I was able to get a sense of the lived experiences of these participants and what worked (and did not work) for their AP programs. As previously mentioned, narrative analysis is a major tenet of CRT by giving value to experiential knowledge of participants. Three major themes emerged from the narratives that I collected. These were: Systemic Changes, Minority and Low-Income Specific Strategies, and Common Pitfalls.

By interviewing my participants and analyzing their narratives, I sought to identify tangible solutions and systems that PSCs report, which can inform instruction in university counseling programs and PSC practices in school districts that ultimately seek to improve minority and low-income students' access to challenging college preparatory curriculum, academic achievement, and postsecondary options. This study also seeks to offer more PSCs throughout the district, state, region and country a system that will allow them to diversify their AP programs by providing educational opportunities and advantages to low-income and minority students.

Researcher Positionality

As a Professional School Counselor, I have worked on recruiting, retaining, and supporting minority and low-income students in AP programs. I am interviewing fellow PSCs about their own systems which can, in and of itself, create biases. After working on the problems detailed throughout this research project, my positionality may impact my perceptions of the interviewed Professional School Counselors' systems.

Furthermore, I am an African American male interviewing PSCs and the director of PSCs about liberating people (based on Critical Race Theory) that come from my cultural background. In order to be open to others and their ideas, I must work to pursue a deeper racial and cultural knowledge about myself and the community of people I study (Milner, 2007). I will present this research and work with my participants knowing that my different roles and experience are embedded in the process and outcomes of education research (Milner, 2007).

My position as a Professional School Counselor who works to find unique ways to recruit and retain minority and low-income students in AP programs could undoubtedly create opinions about what other people in the same position being interviewed are doing. As a result, I have to be intentional about working towards objectivity in order to truly understand my subjects' lived experiences. I have to take my experience as a counselor who has delved into this work and compartmentalize my own experience in order to understand the reality of others.

As mentioned, one of the main purposes of my research is to liberate minority students and offer them access to a program that their White counterparts often get the

opportunity to participate in. As a researcher that identifies himself as a minority, I have to be cognizant of the fact that I may have more passion about creating access points for these students than others. As Milner (2007) explains that researchers who identify as minority have had to create and develop alternative spaces and methodologies for the study of their communities. For me, I must be able to objectively look at what is happening in my school district and find ways to identify and accumulate unique practices that are going to help the students that identify as I do. Milner (2007) also discusses the way we question what it means to experience and live in a world that does not necessarily find the views, preferences, and experiences of color to be normal or acceptable and charges researchers like myself with bringing the voices of these disenfranchised students out into the world. This charge means that even if I do interview people who don't share my enthusiasm about this persistent problem, I must make sure that their voices are heard along with the purpose and need for my research.

District Context

Midwin Public School District is a large urban school district in the southeastern United States, which serves more than 100,000 students. This district is culturally diverse. There are approximately 37,000 African American students, 10,000 Hispanic students, 47,000 White students, 3,600 Asian students, 3,500 multiracial students, 100 American Indian students, and 100 Pacific Islander students. There were 21 high schools, 27 middle schools and 91 elementary schools in the 2015-2016 school year.

School Context

I interviewed a total of six participants and five of them work at different schools within the Midwin Public School District. The sixth is the central office administrator responsible for overseeing the work of PSCs across the district. Each school varies in size and the amount of students who are considered in poverty (based on whether or not they receive free or reduced lunch) varies. Table 1 illustrates these distinctions between schools.

Table 1.

Population Data for Participant Schools

School	Student Population*	Percentage Minority	Percentage Free/Reduced
Jordan High School	1,300	51%	62%
Pioneer High School	1,750	37%	33%
Peak High School	1,850	36%	65%
Sawyer Middle School	1,400	62%	78%
West High School	750	60%	78%
MidWin Public School District	101,000	52%	64%

*Student population was rounded to the nearest 50th in order to ensure confidentiality.

Demographic Information of Participants

For this study, I interviewed six participants. Five of these participants are currently practicing Professional School Counselors and one participant who is the Director of School Counselors in a large urban school district in the Midwest. All six participants work in the same large urban school district. Pseudonyms were used for the district, schools, and participants interviewed for this study. My sample included two

African American females, three White females and one White male (See Table 2). The participants I interviewed were between the ages of 30 and 51 years old. Each PSC currently works in a high school with the exception of one. The exception, worked in a high school one year prior to my interview and currently works in a middle school. Her interview brings a unique perspective because she sees through the high school and middle school counselor lens.

My participants were chosen through a snowball sampling strategy. After reading my first three chapters to get a better sense of my research, the Director of School Counselors sent an email to all high school counselors asking for PSCs to reply if they had worked on increasing minority and low-income student participation in Advanced Placement courses or if they had an interest in that. Out of the many schools in this large urban school district, only two PSCs (from two different schools) replied. As a result, I interviewed those two counselors and worked with the Director of School Counselors to identify other PSCs in the district committed to issues of social justice; specifically increasing minority and low-income student participation in Advanced Placement courses. This yielded three additional PSCs who were identified and willing to be interviewed for this study. All participants chosen to participate in this study have challenged the dominant perspective in their practice in some way. By interviewing them and trying to understand the participants' lived experiences from a Critical Race Theory framework, I sought to understand how they specifically created more access to AP for diverse students.

As previously mentioned, each PSC that I interviewed works at different schools. Out of the five PSCs, four of them worked at schools that had implemented open

enrollment practices in recent years due to their attainment of the Advanced Ed grant. This grant and the company that leads it strive to increase minority and low-income involvement through AP English, Math, and Science classes. The five schools that are represented by PSCs for this study range in population size, the percentage of students that are minority versus White, and the number of students who are considered low-income based on their free/reduced lunch status. These figures are below in

Table 2.

Demographic Data for Participants

Counselor	Age	Race
Mrs. Mission	38	White
Mr. Nikan	51	White
Mrs. Noah	32	African American
Mrs. Twin	41	African American
Mrs. Maria	45	White
Mrs. Standard	39	White

In order to collect my data, I used the same semi-structured interview protocol with the Director of School Counselors and with all PSCs (See Appendix B). I asked clarifying questions during the interviews in order to ensure that the data I received was an accurate interpretation of what my participants discussed. After completing each interview, they were transcribed. Once transcription was completed for all interviews, I used structural coding in order to hand-code them based on themes that were revealed through the interviews. Structural coding is a process that both codes and initially categorizes the data (Saldana, 2009, p. 67). After utilizing structural coding methods, I began descriptive coding. According to Saldana (2009) descriptive coding summarizes in

a word or short phrase, the basis of a passage of qualitative data. Based on the descriptive codes that emerged I created themes that I placed in three categories. These categories are as follows: Systemic Changes, Minority and Low-Income Students, and Common Pitfalls. I will discuss these themes by offering quotes from my interviews in order to provide currently practicing and future PSCs a tangible guide that suggests actions they can take in order to recruit, retain, and support minority and low-income students participating in AP courses. Other educational leaders and graduate school programs will have access to this guide as well. I will also discuss common pitfalls (through quotes from my participants) that currently practicing PSCs, future PSCs, and other educational leaders should avoid when doing this work. I will provide a summary of my findings at the end of this chapter.

Participants

In this section, I will discuss each individual participant and my experience with them during our interview. My interviews with these participants allowed me to learn about them personally and professionally, which enabled me to glean rich data that ultimately allowed me to answer my research question. Much of this new knowledge was learned as a result of first-cycle coding which allowed me to become attuned with the participants' language, perspectives, and worldviews.

Mrs. Mission, MidWin Public Schools

Mrs. Mission is a 38-year-old white female who oversees all of the Professional School Guidance Counselors, Social Workers, Mental Health Counselors, and Bullying Prevention in MidWin Public Schools. She is responsible for supporting the hundreds of

staff members that counsel students across MidWin Public Schools. She realizes that by doing her job well, she is also supporting over 100,000 students. This is Mrs. Mission's third year as the Director of School Counselors in MidWin Public Schools. When asked about how school counselors can recruit minority and low-income students, Mrs. Mission suggested ways that PSCs could do this work:

I would look at who is in AP classes and who are not...Look at students that have...maybe they have...in the beginning of high school as a freshman, they indicate that they would like to go to college...that's something that they talk about but they aren't taking any of the classes that they need in order to be college material for lack of a better word. So helping identify those kids in that way too. So you say you want to go to college...sitting down and doing more of that academic and college counseling in more of a one on one basis with kids to figure out what their steps are.

Mrs. Mission went further to discuss the state of the Professional School Counselor position and how to create more individualized counseling for students. She stated:

That's something that I think has really hurt our students is when...when school counselors were first introduced in the United States, it was primarily for academic and college counseling...that was their primary role...however, that was a small population of students...like the 10% of kids that they thought would actually go to college...Now our role as school counselors has been distorted and there's even a distorted view from school counselors on what our job

responsibilities are and uh, we have chipped away at the fundamental laying of college and career counseling and now we are doing a lot more administrative tasks. So the college process in general has become more complex and more complicated and we have less and less time as school counselors to provide them that service which is the whole reason for our initial existence to begin with. We are doing a lot more mental health crisis counseling and administrative tasks and duties with testing and special education.

I asked how members of the counseling profession could combat the issue of others having misperceptions about the profession and Mrs. Mission stated:

I think it's going to take us doing something that we've never done before...and we have some people that are not willing to do that. So we have to learn how to advocate for our job and take to our administrators numbers of kids for example in this respect...take to our administrators numbers of kids and what the demographics look like of those students and then compare that to the demographics of the school. If you do not have an equal representation of students in your total body population in those AP courses, we are really doing a disservice to our students and we have to be able to have those conversations with our administrators. And say...this is what I should be doing, our college and career rate is not where it should be, our kids that are going to college and staying and graduating is not where it should be. Our students enrolled in our AP courses is not where it should be...and I can't work with those kids...because this is where my time is spent however I see this as a problem and we need to get to showing the data and advocating for the work that we should be doing.

Mrs. Mission's responses reveal that she is passionate about helping minority and low-income students and that she approaches her position from a CRT lens through which she works to create access for students who are commonly marginalized. Conventional wisdom and traditional practices for recruiting students for the AP program in schools has been that schools look for the most gifted and talented students in the school (without considering diversity) and introduce them to AP. When asked how her methods are different than conventional wisdom or traditional practices for recruiting minority and low-income students, Mrs. Mission said:

Conventional methods of recruiting AP kids its making an announcement...it's teachers choosing who they do and do not want in their classes...and we are missing that entire group...If you look at kids the traditional kids who are in AP classes they are not first generation students...they are not low-income students...and they are not minority students....they are having conversations with someone outside of the school in conjunction with someone inside of the school...we have to pick up more of that parental piece to where we are doing more exhaustive counseling with students to help them realize the opportunities.

Mrs. Mission went further to say, "What I see is that counselors are overburdened with so many things that they are like, I can't take on one more thing". Mrs. Mission's statement connects to the research of Harper and Associates (2014) who found, "Guidance Counselors are in serious need of relief- most are expected to serve too many students" (p. 37). Mrs. Mission went further to explain:

That's where that advocacy piece comes from...if we can do it for a little bit...I know it's an extra thing...you know, work on it for a lit bit to show, and then take the data to our administrators, and say, I did this for one year but I can't keep it up at this pace. If you want me to continue to show you these numbers, we have to look at my roles and responsibilities as they stand in this school to make some changes and adjustments.

Finally, Mrs. Mission was asked what she would like to see change in her school district to improve the participation of minority and low-income students in AP programs. She said, "I hate to even put a number on it...I want to see our AP course enrollment mirror our district enrollment...and I think that if we say anything less than that we are shortchanging our kids and it's not acceptable." Hill (2015) showed the disproportionality of AP classes in terms of racial makeup. Hill (2015) noted that in 2013, 15% of graduating seniors in the United States were African American but only 9% of AP test takers were represented by this population. Low-income students made up 48% of the nation's schools yet only 28% of AP test-takers came from this population (Hill, 2015). As Mrs. Mission suggests, PSCs may consider the racial makeup of their schools and work towards mirroring that in their AP classes.

After Mrs. Mission's interview, I recognized the amount of responsibility that she has and the lofty goals she must meet. Mrs. Mission fills her role with passion, excitement, and integrity. Her commitment to a social justice agenda, which is approached from a Critical Race Theory lens, is also notable. I state this because my interviews with Mrs. Mission produced direct connections to the research of Ornelas (2014) who found that CRT is different from other frameworks because it challenges

traditional paradigms and offers a liberatory and transformative method when examining racial, gender, and class discrimination.

It should also be noted that there were two occasions where Mrs. Mission mentioned “those kids”. This was not interpreted as negative although this term does have the potential to have a negative connotation and be considered *othering*. Othering is a term that Jensen (2011) as a process whereby a dominant group defines into existence an inferior group. Prior to, during, and after my interviews I have viewed Mrs. Mission as a liberator who seeks ways to help all marginalized students and their families in her school district.

Mr. Nikan, Jordan High School

Mr. Nikan is a 51-year-old white male. Jordan High School is the only school that he has officially been a PSC and he has worked there for eight years. Mr. Nikan has served on the High School Counselor’s Committee for his school district for over three years. When interviewed, Mr. Nikan revealed that he relies on face-to-face, individual counseling sessions to work with his students. When asked to discuss the enrollment process for students at his school, he replied with the following:

We are talking to them about classes that they have not been successful in or classes that they need to take. You know we are discussing one-on-one their academic success or their academic plans I should say for the present time and the upcoming future. We are able to assess and challenge students if they’ve been successful in like the honors program we say hey you know, we might want to

consider advanced courses or this course, you know, what do you think...and we can talk to them about that individually at that point too.

When asked about what he does to support minority students in AP classes specifically,

Mr. Nikan stated:

I try to support any student in there and I try to encourage them...and I let them know that I'm available if they struggle...you know I encourage them to do what we call remediation and I encourage them to get with the teachers and I help them develop plans for improving themselves, you know.

Mr. Nikan's response reveals the importance of PSCs being accessible to the students they serve and providing individualized attention. Mr. Nikan also showed that intentional planning is important to him and his team in order to ensure that students are knowledgeable about the opportunities to participate in AP at Jordan High School. When asked about how he enrolls students in AP classes, Mr. Nikan replied:

At the moment that's probably it [in terms of what he does to support minorities in AP classes]...we do go to the middle schools and talk about our programs with our advanced classes and we talk about all of our programs but we encourage that to so we do go to middle schools...our feeder schools...you know for...in the fall, we have a middle school information exchange at our school where we invite the middle school counselors in...so our counselors at the middle school level are aware of our programming and our advanced classes and things like that so if they have students that are advanced programming...you know...capable of advanced

work they can encourage them on their end. So we do have that type of a thing where we meet with those counselors in uh...February usually...January or February is when we meet with them. It's kind of like the college-high school information exchange...we've created our own with the middle school and high school information exchange...you know...we try to highlight our programs. We get questions from them and you know we talk about serious things but one of the things we do discuss, among other things is our academic programming...and the coursework that's available so that's one thing that we do...let's see....of course we highlight at our 8th grade open house...we highlight our advanced programming and stuff like that...uh through that as well...trying to think of some other ways we do...of course through our website.

It became clear that Mr. Nikan and his team use innovative methods they use to disseminate information about their AP program.

Mrs. Noah, Pioneer High School

Mrs. Noah is a 32-year-old African American female. She has worked in her school for three years as a PSC. Her office consists of four women. Three of the women are White. Mrs. Noah revealed herself as a social justice advocate who works hard to ensure that her African American population feels that they have a voice in their school. . This is evidenced by Mrs. Noah's challenging traditional paradigms and offering a liberatory method when examining racial, gender, and class discrimination (Ornelas, 2014). Pioneer High School is high achieving and Mrs. Noah revealed that she and her fellow staff members are criticized by others in the district for working in a school

perceived as “having it easy”. Mrs. Noah is one to quickly discount that notion and work hard for all students with special attention towards her African American students. When asked about what she has done to support minorities in AP classes, Mrs. Noah was quick to point out the following, “I find with a lot of our minority kids, a lot of them tend to flock to me no matter what for obvious reasons. There’s not very many minorities [among staff members]”.

Mrs. Noah expressed criticism of school policies and practices, opining that these ran counter to the cause of social justice for all students. Specifically, Mrs. Noah was critical of what she felt were outdated practices at her school. Her responses revealed that she is willing to serve as a forceful advocate for her profession and for the students she serves and these characteristics directly connect to CRT and one of the main tenets of it. Delgado-Bernal (2002) explained that one purpose of CRT is to explore the ways that race-neutral laws and policies perpetuate racial and/or ethnic and gender subordination and by Mrs. Mission. She was honest about her school being driven by several outdated policies and her desire to change them. Specifically, Mrs. Noah is critical of her school making students meet specific test scores in order to participate in the AP program. She stated, “But I’m no fool. I’m not going to do everything at once.” Mrs. Noah realizes that she must be a change agent at her school while doing what is best for students. She has placed herself in a position, politically, to make some of the changes that she strives for at Pioneer High School. When asked about what she has done to remove barriers that are in place at her school for minority and low-income students being involved in AP classes, she stated:

Well at the school where I am now... you know, at Pioneer, everything is driven by policy...and so the best way to bring about change was to run for SBDM (Site Based Decision-Making Committee) and I was elected which I was very thankful for, because no counselor has ever been elected to be on SBDM.

Mrs. Noah revealed that, as a PSC, she has used her position to create access for minorities by continually reinforcing their intelligence, capabilities, and potential. Also, through her participation with her school's SBDM, she has been instrumental in slowly working to get this committee to look at and reconsider policies that are in place.

Mrs. Twin, Peak High School

Mrs. Twin is a 41-year-old African American female. She has worked as a PSC in her school for 11 years. She was one of two PSCs who responded to an email sent out by the Director of School Counselors to all high schools PSCs in the MidWin School District. In this email, the Director of PSCs asked for responses from people who had a passion for working with minority and low-income students in AP Programs.

Ms. Twin expressed a desire to bring PSCs from MidWin closer together in order to create more collaborative and innovative systems. She believes in growing professionally and is often looking for unique ways to do so. At the end of our interview, when asked if there is anything she would like to add to the conversation, Mrs. Twin stated:

I would like to hear other people's ideas and opinions. Can you share that with us? Once you compile after your interviews. Because I would kind of like to

know what other people are doing. We don't really know because we are all in our own schools and we are all doing our own thing.

Mrs. Twin brought to light a unique challenge that she has. When discussing barriers to retaining students in the AP program, she stated the following:

Not really minority students. Once, we kind of get them in there, they kind of stay. My biggest challenge are athletes. So that's personal for me, but my biggest challenge is keeping athletes in those courses. They kind of more tend to want to be like, *no no I'll just take the honors, I'm not going to...* even if they've been advanced before, they kind of will shy away. So that's my biggest challenge now, is trying to get athletes to take it and stay, and...getting the parents onboard because they are more worried about, is this going to hurt his GPA or he's not going to have time to do all this work because he's got practice and that's my challenge and I really don't know how to battle it or, I'm trying to come up with ways to improve that.

While this challenge does not have a direct relationship with minority and low-income students, it brings about an opportunity for future studies and future collaborations among counselors in the MidWin Public School District. Mrs. Twin revealed that she has marketed their AP program in order to gain the interest of students and parents. In response to being asked about her process to recruit minority and low-income students to the AP program, she states, "When we changed our AP program to remove Advanced and just have AP we sat down and we gave it a whole new name and we have a whole new sheet, it's called Peak U." Thus, a simple branding strategy has

attracted more minority and low-income families to the AP program at Peak by replacing AP with something that is less intimidating to minority and low income students.

Mrs. Maria, Sawyer Middle School

Mrs. Maria is a white female who is 45 years old. She is bilingual and often serves as a translator in the schools that she works for the Latino/a population. Prior to becoming a PSC, she taught Spanish. She recently completed her first year at Sawyer Middle School after working as a high school counselor for eleven years at two different schools. She was my final PSC interviewed and was identified by means of snowball sampling. She was identified consistently by earlier informants as a PSC who works toward expanding minority and low income student participation in AP courses by visiting middle schools and ensuring that the students and counselors were knowledgeable about the programs offered at their school. PSCs mentioned the importance of discussing the benefits of the AP program at these middle schools. As a result of having both high school and middle school experience, Mrs. Maria provided a valuable and informative perspective. Interviewing Mrs. Maria was an opportunity to learn about the lived experience of someone who had substantial experience with Latino students and has sought to liberate them in her career. She is yet another example of a PSC who approaches her work through a Critical Race Theory lens. When asked about her process for recruiting minority and low-income students to AP courses, she stated:

I look for kids that have curiosity about things. I look for them to... You know I have a lot of kids who are smart but may have been under-recognized for their intelligence. I look at the different type of intelligences or leadership skills.

What Mrs. Maria really seems to be talking about is that minority and low-income student's cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) should be valued instead of the very common and traditional methods of creating lower expectations for these students. This is a major tenet of Critical Race Theory, which chooses to focus on the values of minority and low-income students versus their deficits. When asked about the largest barriers that minority and low-income students have for entering into AP classes and staying in them, Mrs. Maria goes further to say:

I think that they have had a history of low expectations and a lot of the elementary and middle schools...don't really push the kids to read at a high level...the way that...we would somebody that was not a minority kid because they learn differently...a lot of them do...because of the way they were raised early on...It's not every one of them, but the kids are very active because their families are very active...and so they have trouble sitting down and concentrating and they're not really taught to their...own strengths necessarily. And so I feel like they don't really feel like that they have the background either when they get up to AP or the high school level.

From Mrs. Maria's perspective, teachers (especially AP teachers) need to consider how minority and low-income students learn and meet their needs instead of furthering the miseducation of these students and continuing to put them in positions to meet (or not meet) low expectations. When asked how she works to remove barriers for minority and low-income students, Mrs. Maria also had a unique perspective. She said:

It's the same thing as minority and low-income students. A lot of the kids have not been read to as much...their parents don't necessarily have that knowledge base that they need to read to the kid every day...they watch a lot of television...the parents have to work two jobs to support them and so they have that kind of challenge so what I try to do as a counselor is to try and help the teachers and try to help the kids by guiding them into a reading that is going to be interesting for that kid. And so try to catch them with their interests and try to sneak in that reading and pushing it.

Mrs. Maria revealed that PSCs can help minority and low-income students achieve if given information, opportunity, and high expectations.

Mrs. Standard, West High School

Mrs. Standard is a 39-year-old PSC who has been a counselor for seven years. She has worked at her current school for five years. She is the upcoming president of the high school counselor group in MidWin Public Schools. Mrs. Standard offered insight on what she sees as the largest barriers for minority and low-income students entering into and staying in AP classes, stating:

Confidence first of all. You know, they don't have the confidence. I don't think that most of them have the support outside of the school system to do...or the school day, to do the work involved for the rigor. Technology outside of the school being another one.

Mrs. Standard brought to light that PSCs, and educators generally, do not know or consider the many barriers that minority and low-income students face on a personal

level; specifically a lack of parental support and a potential lack of technology. These two barriers alone can be the impetus for a lack of success, a lack of access, and a lack of ability for students. PSCs can address these barriers in their practices to put minority and low-income students in positions to achieve success. Mrs. Standard revealed simple and small ways to support minority and low-income students in AP classes:

You know...just listening. I'm a note writer. I like to send private little notes to my kids so if I...if you came into my office yesterday and you were super stressed about, you know, getting ready for this mock exam or whatever it is, then I may send you, you know like a candy bar the next day or put a little message with it, or when it's over I might give you a payday and say, you know congratulations or you know so just little things like that...it really does depend on the student. Sometimes I'm harder on some students that I am on others because I know that they need that push. So again it's individualized attention there.

Here, Mrs. Standard shows the importance of individualized attention and inspiration. By working to motivate students and to remind them how very capable they really are, Mrs. Standard shows PSCs that we have to find our unique counseling styles to challenge disenfranchised students into becoming the successful students that we know they can be in AP classes.

Analytical Strategy

As mentioned in Chapter 3, there are several analytical strategies being used in this study in order to ensure the reliability of the findings and conclusions. The foundation of this research is based on phenomenological interviews and narrative

inquiry. I used a 10 question interview protocol with each participant to produce data that would ultimately answer my research question. I utilized inductive coding in this research and used In Vivo, Structural, and Descriptive coding methods.

As mentioned, inductive coding was used throughout my data analysis by reading through raw transcriptions (data) in order to interpret concepts and themes. Structural Coding was used to categorize data associated with broad themes. I used Descriptive Coding to put each passage from my transcriptions into broad categories. I also used direct phrases used by participants to code data during this raw reading. By doing this, I utilized In Vivo coding methods. This allowed me to attune myself to my participants' language, perspectives, and worldviews. By coding my data using the methods described, I identified categories that connected and found three major themes that emerged. A table of my codes is below (See Table 3).

After coding my data, I used cross case analyses. Cross-case analysis was used in order to delineate the combination of factors that may have contributed to the outcomes of this research (Khan & VanWynsbege, 2008). I also used this method in order to make sense of unique findings and in order to further articulate the major concepts uncovered through my interviews (Khan & VanWynsbege, 2008). In this chapter, when discussing my findings and themes that emerged from my interviews, I will often refer to the narratives of multiple participants so that the reader can understand the importance and varying methods used to approach the situations/themes discussed.

Throughout my interviews, I used analytic memos. These memos reminded me of feelings that I had when my participants spoke or thoughts that I had as they spoke. I was

able to process my participants' perspectives through this process. Analytic memos also helped me better understand the topics that my participants were truly passionate about along with helping me to identify broad and then, ultimately, major themes that emerged from the data. These memos were written throughout the transcriptions of participant interviews and after each of the interviews took place.

Table 3: Codes and Themes from Participant Interviews

Theme	Participant Responses	Participant					
		Mrs. Mission	Mr. Nikan	Mrs. Noah	Mrs. Twin	Mrs. Maria	Mrs. Standard
Systemic Changes	Create or Challenge Policy			X			X
	Gain Teacher Buy-In	X	X	X	X		
	Remove Barriers	X		X			X
	Create Open Enrollment Policies	X	X	X		X	X
	Consider the Levels Offered At the School			X	X		X
	Offer More AP Classes			X	X		
	Capture Unique Data	X					X
	Work Closely with Middle Schools	X	X				
Minority and Low-Income Specific Strategies	Have Students Sign Agreements		X	X		X	
	Guidance Sessions		X		X		X
	Individual Counseling Sessions	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Teach Resilience	X	X			X	
	Student Mentors	X				X	
Common Pitfalls to Avoid	Inform Minority and Low-Income Families about the Benefits of AP	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Test Into AP	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Summer Assignments			X		X	

Member checking took place prior to defending my dissertation. My subjects were offered an opportunity to read the transcripts of our interviews along with my final report in order to ensure that my interpretation of their statements, feelings, and experiences were accurate (Creswell, 2014). By offering my informants an opportunity to read through my data, they were given an opportunity to discuss any inaccuracies that they found.

Study Findings

Through my interviews, three major themes emerged. They included the following: Systemic Changes, Minority and Low-Income Specific Strategies, and Common Pitfalls. There are several subsections within each theme listed above. Subsections were broader themes that emerged from the data. Below, I list each of the three major themes and then discuss the broader themes that make up the overarching theme.

Theme 1: Systemic Changes

Systemic changes are discussed in nine codes. Informants revealed processes that appear to work well for counselors who recruit, retain, and support minority and low-income students in AP programs and classes. They include: (1) PSCs Put Themselves in a Position to Create or Change Policy, (2) Gain Teacher Buy-In, (3) Remove Barriers, (4) Exposure Through Open Enrollment, (5) PSCs Consider the Levels of Courses Offered at

Their Schools, (6) Offer More AP Courses, (7) Capture Unique Data, (8) Reach Out to Middle Schools, (9) PSCs Create Agreements with Students.

PSCs Put Themselves in a Position to Create or Change Policy

Mrs. Noah discussed the importance of PSCs putting themselves in a position to create or change policy in their school. She does this by participating on her school's Site Based Decision-Making Committee (SBDM). Her school used a policy that she did not agree with for their AP program. This school is driven by policy and PSCs that do anything outside of policy have experienced negative responses quickly. At Pioneer High School, to gain access to a freshman level AP class, students had to reach a certain score on a standardized test called the Cog At, which seeks to identify gifted and talented students. Mrs. Noah said the following about her experience:

I also serve on SBDM where we make policies to approve the scheduling book which approves certain criteria for kids to get into the classes. So really serving on SBDM, working with the faculty, the department chairs directly to create the scheduling book as well as with other administration to talk about what is it we want to see together with the Cog At² scores and then taking that to SBDM for approval. You know I wanted to get rid of the Cog At scores but there was some compromise. So instead of looking at three scores associated with the Cog At scores, with the exception of I think math and science, we are only looking at two. So that's a small victory. It is a victory nonetheless.

² Cog At is a test used in school districts that is often used to screen students for Advance Programs.

Mrs. Standard also revealed evidence of how PSCs can create or challenge policies and practices. Mrs. Standard stated the following:

Then the other thing I would say is we do not have an advanced. When we get up to an 11th and 12th grade, the AP is the advanced. So we go comp, honors, AP. So the advanced kids are almost forced in there if they want that advanced diploma. This was a policy that we helped put in place a few years ago.

Rather than only being subjected to policies and practice, these two informants provided evidence that currently practicing and future PSCs can take proactive roles in making or changing policies in their schools. In so doing, they can work to ensure that traditionally marginalized students have greater opportunities to achieve success.

Gain Teacher Buy-In

Informants revealed that teachers can be a large barrier to students enrolling in and staying in AP classes. In response, PSCs may work toward influencing teachers in their buildings to see that access to AP is a vital means for traditionally marginalized groups to succeed in high school, college, and beyond. For example, Mrs. Standard said, “I think it is really getting the belief in the teachers to believe that they can take, not the top of the class, but just a hard-working student and make....you know, get them to survive in an AP class.”

Mrs. Mission discussed reasons for PSCs to work with teachers and ways to do it by stating the following:

There's also a missing piece where we have to talk with our teachers...and our teachers have to be fully aware that these are things we need to do to help our minority kids be successful to identify them... to help get them included in that entire process because sometimes the teacher is the barrier. Not necessarily the student...now the student may have the desire...but the actions of the teacher tells them that they will not be successful and they are not welcome...so having counselors go into...I know most schools in our district anyways have PLC groups in each department...I think it would be great if just a couple times a year, if the counseling team just splits up and goes to those PLC groups and talk specifically about...let's look at some kids and talk specifically about an emphasis on finding minority students to help them be successful in there too.

Mrs. Twin had a unique story that shows the power of the counselor working with teachers in order to create access to AP for disenfranchised students:

One year we had a class that was pretty low in attendance for an AP class, I worked with that teacher and we talked about, okay, I need your help in reaching out to these kids. You want more kids in this class and you want this class to be successful. So for the following year at end of the school year, we had a meet and greet with her and the parents. She talked about her class and what type of community it would be and, just reassuring that the kids will learn, they will pass the AP test, just kind of reassuring to build up her class again, because it was falling off. That really helped! Throughout, she sent them a little card over the summer saying, I'm really looking forward to you being in my class, reaching out,

making it more personable, and once we did that it helped her class to grow even more.

After interviewing my participants, four out of six discussed the importance of PSCs working to gain teacher buy-in for diversifying AP programs. If teachers do not understand that access and willingness to work with traditionally marginalized groups in some of the most rigorous classes offered at the school, minority and low-income students will continue to have to fight for equal footing in these classes and in AP programs in general. Furthermore, by having teacher buy-in, PSCs can hope for higher expectations by teachers of their minority and low-income students. This connects to the findings of Boser et al., (2014) who stated that “High school students whose teachers have higher expectations about their future success are far more likely to graduate from college” (para. 4). By doing the foundational work of getting teachers to understand and buy-in to open enrollment to increase the participation of minority and low-income students in AP, PSCs have the opportunity to help these students succeed in high school, college, and thereafter.

Remove Barriers

There are several barriers that minority and low-income students may face when it comes to pursuing AP opportunities. One of these barriers is the cost of the AP exam. Each exam is above \$90. While there is a lower price of \$53 for students who receive free or reduced lunch, a cost still remains nonetheless. Another barrier is confidence. Among the informants, 3 out of 6 participants identified students having low confidence

as barriers for them. Finally, 3 out of 6 participants also identified low expectations from staff members as another barrier.

At West High School, Mrs. Standard stated, “The biggest barrier that we have removed was the money. Money was not ever going to be an issue for any student to not take an AP course.” Mrs. Standard revealed that the costs barrier was addressed after finding that cost was often a deterrent for students who may have otherwise taken an AP class. As a result, her school found ways to pay for student exams when the need arises. Mrs. Noah discussed another way for PSCs to help with the burden of paying for AP exams. She said, “With reference to the financial piece, we need to make sure that parents are aware when they sign up that they are eligible [for a reduced price on the tests].” Giving families this knowledge may help attract more diverse and low-income students to AP.

Based on Mrs. Noah’s interview, currently practicing and future PSCs may ensure that parents and students know that they may receive financial assistance for AP exams when they are signing up or enrolling for classes in order to keep finances from being a deterrent. Removing barriers for families (particularly in terms of finances and resources) subscribes to the findings of the American Psychological Association (2015) who found that a lack of resources for low-income houses is a major factor that has implications for a persistent achievement gap. Klopfenstein (2003) also found the following: “Low-income reduces AP participation rates by approximately 40 percent” (p. 16). By acknowledging a potential lack of resources for minority and low-income families, PSCs are creating a path to AP that does not have to burden these families.

To help improve student confidence, Mrs. Maria stated, “I try to bolster their self-esteem and all of that is...you know...and try to give them some kind of hope.”

Similarly, Mr. Nikan suggested the importance of providing one-on-one supports:

Individually speaking to them and encouraging them to challenge themselves.

And talking to them about other students that have been successful. And expressing to them and letting them know look where they are look at what happened to them...you can do that too.

In order to offset low expectations by staff members, participants offered suggestions to future PSCs. Mrs. Mission stated:

I think one of the first things that counselors have to do is start using data to guide the conversation so they need to look at the data in their school and the numbers of the kids that are currently taking AP courses and find where we have missing groups of kids that are being represented...and so we know where to target these interventions and then also...that’s great to identify the students and it’s great to have smaller group conversations with our minority students to help them understand.

By using data to identify diverse students for AP, PSCs can contribute to a more equitable school community and AP program. Mrs. Maria made a point to say the following about how she counteracts low expectations at her school. She stated, “I’m different than other counselors because I look at things holistically. I don’t just try to look at test scores...I think it’s important to look beyond just the test scores.”

After interviewing my participants, three out of six participants discussed the importance of PSCs removing barriers in order to help recruit, support, and retain minorities in their AP programs. PSC informants revealed that they can accomplish this goal by considering multiple data points for the recruitment of students. By considering multiple metrics, PSCs can better identify their diverse students who show AP potential. Furthermore, PSCs can find ways to help students pay for AP exams. This can also help bolster AP enrollments while removing barriers. All of these aforementioned processes help ensure that minorities and low-income students have access to the AP program through a social justice approach.

Exposure through Open Enrollment

Participants in this study continually reiterated the importance of AP courses introducing high school students to a high level of rigor. Mrs. Standard said, “We only have the AP right now. And if that’s all we can expose our kids to, whether they pass the exam or not, they are seeing what true rigor is like in a classroom.” Mrs. Noah also stated, “And trying to make them understand that it is really about the exposure to the higher level curriculum and that’s what will equal success for the kid.”

The informants suggested that PSCs can work toward creating a paradigm shift in their buildings and with staff by discussing AP as an access point to rigor rather than another way to tout how great the school and faculty are. Accountability policies encourage comparisons of districts, schools, and educators. One of the ways that schools may do this is by comparing how many students passed at one school instead of another. For example, Mrs. Noah addressed this by saying:

So kind of assisting our building in maybe shifting our way of thinking in regards to not just what's in it for us and how we look based on our AP scores and I think for a long time that's pretty much...that's just a way of thinking that's been embedded in that school for years and years and years and it is really hard to get people out of that way of thinking.

Mrs. Maria said, "The enrollment process at my school...we practiced open enrollment because we believed that if a kid really wanted to take that class, they needed to have the opportunity." Peak High School also utilizes open enrollment for their AP program. Mrs. Twin said, "Any kids that want to try, we never turn them away." Mr. Nikan from Jordan High School also stated, "AP is open to all of them. There's a class selection and they are open to anybody."

In total, six out of six informants discussed the importance of open enrollment for helping to diversify into AP programs. Currently practicing and future PSCs may work to create open enrollment policies at their schools for AP. By doing this, PSCs acknowledge the findings of Hill (2015) who claims that in 2013, 15% of graduating seniors in the United States were African American but only 9% of AP test takers were represented by this population. Low-income students made up 48% of the nation's schools yet only 28% of AP test takers came from this population (Hill, 2015). These data suggest that minority and low-income students are disadvantaged by a lack of participation in a program that offers academic advantages to students. By opening the doors to AP, PSCs acknowledge the gross disparities that have historically been a part of the AP program while also suggesting that students with the desire to take AP classes should not be deterred and have the same right to participate as Whites.

Examine Levels and AP Offerings

Three out of six PSCs mentioned ways to avoid allowing students to take an easier route than AP. With this in mind, these schools removed a level from their programming. Schools that offer comprehensive, honors, advanced, and AP may consider removing a level to increase AP enrollment for minority and low-income students. At Peak High School, they removed the Advanced level in order to gear more students toward AP. Mrs. Twin stated, “By us not having advanced, a lot of the kids, a lot of our advanced kids are taking AP and they don’t want to take honors so they want to stay, so that really helped.” Similarly, Mrs. Standard said, “Then the other thing I would say is we do not have an advanced [level]. When we get up to an 11th and 12th grade, the AP is the advanced. So we go comp, honors, AP.” Finally, Mrs. Noah explained that the following that happened at Pioneer High School, “We really revved up our AP course offerings so that’s been kind of the driving vision and force of our principal is to make us competitive with other schools and offering more AP.” My participants were able to both increase enrollment in AP programs and diversify them by changing the levels offered at their schools. They also accomplished this by increasing the amount of appealing AP classes at their schools.

In sum, three out of six participants discussed the importance of PSCs considering the levels of classes offered in their schools. By creating more sections of AP and fewer sections that are considered less rigorous, currently practicing and future PSCs may be able to nudge more diverse students towards the AP program.

Capture Unique Data

A common PSC practice is to examine gifted and talented data in order to recruit and place students into AP classes. The PSCs that served as informants for this study suggested that currently practicing and future PSCs may find and use unique data that works for their school populations. These data may suggest that a student would do well in a particular AP class or that they might like it. Mrs. Mission, Director of School Counselors states:

I think one of the first things that counselors have to do is start using data to guide the conversation so they need to look at the data in their school and the numbers of the kids that are currently taking AP courses and find where we have missing groups of kids that are being represented so we know where to target these interventions.

Two informants (Mission and Standard) rationalize that if one is willing to use unique data, one can recruit more minority and low-income students by considering what scores work and do not work for AP courses in their schools. PSCs commonly use prior test score data to recruit students for AP classes. These two informants suggest that PSCs may also look at academic history within a certain academic area(s) and note that although a student may not be strong in math or history or science, the individual may have consistently shown that he or she is strong in English, suggesting potential for success in an AP English course. The two informants suggested that counselors can also use unique data points to find potential interest in AP classes. A PSC may not look at previous test scores, grades, or academic background for a class like AP Psychology for

example, but they may look at career builder data or other data points that show what majors each student may choose in college and pull the names of students interested in a field like psychology, counseling, or social work as a unique way to recruit for this class.

To conclude, two out of six participants discussed the importance of using unique data to help recruit diverse AP students. These participants suggested that looking at student data from multiple vantage points may provide evidence of promise in AP courses.

Reach Out to Middle Schools

Two informants (Mission and Nikan) suggested that PSCs may consider working with middle schools to evoke interest in AP at a younger age. Mrs. Mission stated:

These conversations really need to happen in middle school and it's the high school counselor that really needs to do it in the middle school. The high school counselor needs to go to the middle school, have conversations with kids to help them really understand. The middle school counselors just do not have that same breadth of understanding of college.

Jordan High School takes this a step further by working hand in hand with middle school counselors to ensure that they are knowledgeable about the programs that are available to their students when they get to high school. Mr. Nikan stated:

In the fall, we have a middle school information exchange at our school where we invite the middle school counselors in...so our counselors at the middle school

level are aware of our programming and our advanced classes. So if they have students capable of advanced work they can encourage them on their end.

Through my interviews, three out of six participants discussed the importance of high school PSCs working with middle schools to help raise awareness and expectations to diverse students about AP. These PSCs suggest that currently practicing and future PSCs do this to ensure that future high school students are well-informed about the AP program at their schools and to empower these students to choose AP.

PSCs Create Agreements with Students

Many interviews (four out of six) showed that students often try to remove themselves from challenging work. In reference to AP classes, specifically, I heard about students who would try the class but want to quickly come out. Mrs. Standard said the following:

As a counselor, you have kids that come in your office everyday who tell you I can't do this, this teacher hates me, I got a D and take me out of this...you know take me out of this class. As counselors it is our job to get them back in there and let them know that making mistakes is what we learn from.

Mrs. Noah also stated, "They are quick to say, I want a schedule change, I want to come out...And so when you take that off the table, you can really problem solve with the goal of them staying in the class."

Mrs. Maria also stated:

I make them hang in there for at least a semester and at least give all that they can for that semester. I challenge them because I worry that they won't be successful later in life because they don't overcome a challenge if you just let them off...you are giving up on them just like they everyone else has given up on them.

In sum, three out of six participants discussed a need for future and currently practicing PSCs to have students sign an agreement to stay in an AP class for an extended amount of time. These participants believe that when students know that they are going to be challenged and that there is no easy way out of that challenge, they must work through obstacles instead of simply giving up.

Theme 2: Minority and Low-Income Specific Strategies

In this section, I discuss ways that PSCs work directly with minority and low-income students and their families to recruit, retain, and support these students in AP courses. This theme is discussed in five parts: (1) Guidance Sessions, (2) Individual Counseling, (3) Teach Resilience, (4) Find Mentors, (5) Inform Families.

Guidance Sessions are the First Step at Introducing AP to Students

Participating PSCs in my interview discussed a two-step process for scheduling students in AP classes. Without knowing it, they use very similar processes to accomplish the goal of recruiting, retaining, and supporting minority students in AP classes. This two-step process sounds simple but it is quite a bit of work for PSCs. My participants discussed a large group guidance session (3 out of 6) that reviewed the importance and benefits of AP classes and then individual sessions (6 out of 6) with students that helped challenge them face to face. Mr. Nikan stated:

The first phase would be the counselors going into the English class and talking to the students and advising them about courses that they would rather take and we do that...like, two weeks prior to the individual sessions...so we kind of *double whammy* them. We give them a general overall advising session...and of course answering individual questions and things of that nature, and then we individualize it individually in the seminar room.

Mrs. Standard went further to say, “As far as 10th through 12th grade, you know like I said we go into the English classes and we talk to a lot of them individually.”

Working with students in large group guidance sessions and then individualizing information for students to discuss their own individual AP potential was one key that showed participants success in recruiting, retaining, and supporting diverse students in AP.

Individual Counseling is Key

All (six out of six) participants discussed the importance of meeting with minority and low-income students individually in order to recruit, support, and retain them in AP classes. This is the second step of enrolling minority and low-income students in AP classes for PSCs. When talking with Jordan High School PSC, Mr. Nikan stated, “We meet with every student one on one with every student in the building as a counseling team.” Mrs. Noah at Pioneer High School does the same thing and said, “We sit and we meet with the kids and look at their transcripts. And if they have a solid A or B for the year in a class, I’ll encourage them.”

At Peak High School, Mrs. Twin emphasized the importance of meeting with each student individually and even having individual conversations with the parents. She said, “We are identifying those kids, talking to those kids, talking it up, and encouraging those kids to take it [AP courses], and talking to those parents.” Mrs. Twin mentioned “those kids” in reference to her target population. She is thoroughly interested in helping traditionally disenfranchised students and this language should not be viewed as evidence of othering (Kumashio, 2000; Jensen, 2011). Mrs. Standard also said, “It is a lot of one on one, counselor, teacher, student together and just trying to boost their confidence up that they can do this.”

Mrs. Missions concludes, “They (PSCs) could sit down with them [students] and develop a plan and almost chunk what the assignments are and what is being given to them.. They can plan out their assignments and plan out the course work to where it is not overwhelming.” As one can see, my participants strongly call for current and future PSCs to meet with each of their students individually in order to challenge them face-to-face with the opportunity to take AP classes.

In sum, all six participants discussed the need for individual counseling in order to help recruit, retain, and support minority students in AP programs. These participants felt that a process for meeting with each student in a PSC’s caseload was important to ensure that they were being challenged to the most of their ability.

Teach Resilience

Over and over again, informants discussed how minority and low-income students lack confidence to participate in AP classes. For example, Mrs. Maria sought to explain

the dearth of minority and low-income students stating, “Number one they get scared.” Mrs. Noah also stated, “If they’ve never been in AP, they just hear AP and they’re like, you know I’m not that smart or that’s not me.” Mr. Nikan said, “The main barrier that I see is that students lack self-confidence.” As one can see, self-confidence is a pervasive issue among traditionally disenfranchised groups of students. It is the role of the PSC to increase confidence and teach resilience. Mr. Nikan offered a strong solution for teaching resilience:

Well individually speaking with them and encouraging them and showing them you know that they can do it. I definitely try to individually speak to them and encourage them to challenge themselves. And talking to them about other students that have been successful. And expressing to them and letting them know look where they are look at what happened to them...you can do that too. Just makes them feel motivated because it’s an encouragement type thing. We show them how they can be successful.

Another strategy that may build both confidence, self-efficacy, and resilience among minority and low-income students is the provision of mentors. Researchers suggest that mentoring is associated with a range of positive outcomes for mentors, mentees, and the organizations in which they serve (e.g., Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Fletcher & Mullen, 2012). As one will see next, informants in this study also suggested that the use of mentors working with minority and low-income students can increase their enrollments in AP courses and increase the likelihood of success in the courses and beyond.

Find Mentors

Two informants that participated in this study suggested the use of mentors. Furthermore, these informants recommended that PSCs provide minority and low-income students with a specific type and characteristics of mentors; specifically, student mentors who have similar backgrounds as them. Mrs. Mission states:

Look at some of your upperclassmen that are minorities and are successful and that can talk about how this really helped change their educational perspective and college readiness for them...go in and talk to those younger students too...to help them see there is someone like me...there's someone I can relate to taking these classes that's being successful and sometimes they listen to those kids more than they do the adults.

To summarize, two out of six participants discussed the importance of finding student mentors for diverse students in AP programs. By providing minority and low-income children student mentors, PSCs can help students new to AP feel a sense of comfort and confidence in their own abilities to achieve in these classes.

Ensure that Minority and Low-income Students and Their Families are Knowledgeable about AP

An oft-heard statement is that *knowledge is power*. Unfortunately, minority and low-income families often lack the knowledge they need to increase their agency and power (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Klopfenstein, 2003; Schhneider, Martinez, & Ownes, 2006). Informants that participated in my study understood this dynamic and several of them discussed the importance of educating families and students about the benefits of

AP. For example, Mrs. Noah discussed the importance of talking to families about AP and stating, “For a lot of the minority and low-income families, the biggest barrier is the parents not really understanding the options for the kids. So the more you can educate them and get the parents on your side then the parents are pushing the kid you know.” Similarly, Mrs. Standard stated, “I’ll be honest with you, a lot of them don’t even know what AP is until they come to high school.”

Mrs. Noah, an African-American revealed personal evidence of not even being aware that her high school offered AP classes until her own adulthood. She stated, “It makes you wonder why...why wasn’t I informed or selected...and it makes me think maybe my ACT scores would have been higher...you know...it just makes you look back and wonder about all of the options.” Currently practicing and future PSCs may hold guidance sessions for students and parent information sessions in order to ensure that students and their families know about the importance and benefits of the AP program.

Consistent across all of the informants was the recommendation that all PSCs strongly consider unique ways to market their programs in order to gain interest and disseminate information. As mentioned previously, Peak High School administrators and PSCs came up with a new name for their AP program that has allowed their program to grow. Mrs. Twin said, “We changed our AP program to remove Advanced and just have AP. We sat down and we gave it a whole new name. It is called Peak U”. This kind of innovation has the potential to draw more students and parents to the AP program to learn more about its opportunities. In so doing, these new labels avoid generating anxieties associated with “AP”—real and perceived. Informants also recommended holding parent information sessions about AP programs that are coupled with information disseminated

through multiple means of reaching the target audience. These could include newsletters, emails, and on the school website for parents. Finally, PSCs should create spaces for minority families and students to see the positive impact that AP can make on them and that it has made on other minority and low-income students. By doing these things, PSCs will be confirming the findings of Harper (2015) who stated, “Students of color who are exposed to positive messages about themselves, their schools, and their communities often develop healthier identities and higher educational aspirations” (p. 163). PSCs will also be informing parents who often struggle with navigating the educational system about a system that can truly influence their children and help them achieve.

Theme 3: Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Just as I heard about what PSCs should do to increase the participation of minority and low-income students, I heard about practices that they should avoid. When talking about Pioneer High School, Mrs. Noah discussed the fact that incoming freshmen had to reach a certain score on their Cog At test. She stated, “A lot of our minority or low-income students don’t have that Cog-At score so what that means is that they don’t start off on that track.” Informants consistently suggested that PSCs consider metrics other than one test score that suggests if a student should or should not have the opportunity to participate in AP.

Less consistent, but still evident among the informants was the recommendation that PSCs avoid the use of summer assignments and programming. One of the informants was Mrs. Noah who stated the following:

A lot of our AP courses require the kids to do summer reading project or assignment. So at the beginning of the year it seems to be a lot of kids wanting to come out of AP because of the workload over the summer. And then once you dig a little deeper you start to ask questions and find out that the kid didn't have access to the reading over the summer or didn't have access to go and get the book.

In summary, two out of six participants discussed summer reading and testing into AP as barriers. These participants suggested that PSCs should work to remove the barriers of summer assignments and testing into AP in order to participate. Many minority and low-income students have alternative responsibilities over the summer that may be a barrier to completing these assignments. Others may not test well, but still show AP potential through other means.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings of my study. These findings are based on the analysis of interview data collected from six informant. My findings were discussed in terms of three major themes that emerged from the coding of data. The first theme was Systemic Changes. There were nine codes that emerged from the analysis for this major theme that include: (1) PSCs Put Themselves in a Position to Create or Change Policy, (2) Gain Teacher Buy-In, (3) Remove Barriers, (4) Exposure Through Open Enrollment, (5) PSCs Consider the Levels of Courses Offered at Their Schools, (6) Offer More AP Courses, (7) Capture Unique Data, (8) Reach Out to Middle Schools, (9) PSCs Create Agreements with Students. My second major theme was Minority and Low-Income

Students. There were five codes that developed into this major theme, including: (1) Guidance Sessions are the First Step at Introducing AP to Students, (2) Individual Counseling, (3) Teach Resilience, (4) Find Mentors, (5) Minority and Low-Income Families. My third major theme was Common Pitfalls to Avoid. This was the smallest of the three themes, having two codes that emerged from the analysis—avoiding testing in AP and summer assignments.

Having discussed the analysis of the data that were collected from my informants, I now turn to our discussion of the findings and the implications that these may have for policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

By interviewing professional school counselors (PSCs) and analyzing their narratives, I sought to identify tangible solutions and systems that they reported, which could inform instruction in university counseling programs and PSC practices in school districts that ultimately improve minority and low-income students' access to challenging college preparatory curriculum, academic achievement, and postsecondary options. Through this study, I also sought to offer PSCs throughout the district, state, region and country strategies that may allow them to diversify their AP programs by providing educational opportunities and advantages to low-income and minority students. This study is a valuable addition to the literature due to a lack of empirical analysis of how PSCs specifically, could improve the recruitment, retention, and support of minority and low-income students in AP classes. Griffin and Steen (2011) explain:

Despite a vast body of literature that stresses the importance of school counselors in addressing inequities that exists in schools, few articles provide concrete strategies that school counselors can infuse in their practice. More research is warranted because many school counselors face barriers when trying to implement systemic change in the schools. In fact, one of the biggest barriers is the lack of power that school counselors may hold in their schools. (p. 76)

PSCs are educational stakeholders with the potential to play integral roles in improving access to rigorous coursework and postsecondary options for minority and low-income students. This study reveals that improved access to AP and postsecondary

education for K-12 students is possible, offering strategies from PSCs and for PSCs that seek to improve educational outcomes for minority and low-income students prior to graduation and afterwards. After a summary of the key findings, implications for practice, policy and future research are offered.

Discussion of Key Findings

One major research question framed this study: How do school counselors remove barriers for culturally diverse and low-income students by recruiting, retaining and supporting them in Advanced Placement (AP) courses? To answer this research question, I interviewed five PSCs and the central office administrator responsible for PSCs across a large urban school district in order to better understand their lived experiences of being counselor advocates for increasing the racial and socio-economic diversity of students who participated (or are current participating) in Advanced Placement classes. Through qualitative analysis of the data, codes and themes emerged. These themes are summarized below.

My interviews produced some connections to previous literature along with new findings. I found connections to the socioeconomic background of minority families potentially creating obstacles for navigating school systems in general and AP specifically. My interviews confirmed that removing financial obstacles can improve the likelihood of minority student participation in AP. They also reiterated the fact that PSCs have the potential to be the missing link between minority families (parents/guardians) and the school in which their student(s) attends. The opportunities that PSCs create can help create access for AP by educating families about the benefits of the program. These

opportunities also have the potential to create a domino effect that ultimately opens the door for students graduating from high school, attending college, and completing college within four years.

My interviews and research differ from previous literature in several ways. I did not find research that considered current PSCs in the field, interviewed them, and then produced immediate steps for future PSCs to take in order to increase and diversify AP enrollment in their schools. Specifically, my research produced four major themes and within those themes, recommendations from my participants on items that future PSCs could utilize in their programs to accomplish these goals. Previous research did not address the following items that can directly impact the enrollment and diversity of AP programs: PSCs put themselves in a position to create or change policy in the school, PSCs work to gain teacher and staff buy-in for why an increase in AP diversity is necessary, PSCs remove barriers to AP, PSCs create exposure to AP through open enrollment, PSCs capture unique data when recruiting minorities to AP, PSCs work with middle schools to educate younger students about their AP programs, and PSCs create agreements with students to stay in AP instead of letting them opt out or “drop” AP. The results of this study will add to the research and give PSCs and educational leaders tools they can utilize in order to increase the impact of their AP programs.

Theme 1: Systemic Changes

In order to successfully recruit, retain, and support minority and low-income students in AP classes, PSCs may put several systems in place. Systemic implementations suggest that the ideas that follow have the potential to affect the entire

purpose behind what PSCs are trying to achieve here. PSCs may put themselves in a position to create or affect policy at their schools. This will allow them to prioritize access for minority and low-income students for their schools, staffs, and other stakeholders.

In order to create more access for minority and low-income students, PSCs should gain teacher buy-in. Through my interviews, I found that teachers have the potential to be barriers for minority and low-income students to participate in AP classes. PSCs should work to gain teacher buy-in or an understanding of why access for these students is so incredibly important.

PSCs may remove barriers for minority and low-income students who participate in AP classes. These barriers may be financial burdens or outdated systems. No matter the barrier, PSCs may work to overcome it for their minority and low-income students. PSCs should strongly consider creating open enrollment policies at their schools. Open enrollment allows all students who believe they can succeed in AP to participate. It is not structured to have stringent cut scores and it does not only give access based on teacher recommendations. Access to everyone is the mantra for AP open enrollment schools.

PSCs may consider the levels of classes offered at their schools. Are there too many? Do some allow students to “take the easy road”? If so, PSCs may work to minimize the levels of classes in order for AP to be the option chosen for students willing to take challenging courses (especially in 11th and 12th grade). An example of this would be for schools that offer Comprehensive, Honors, Advanced, and Advanced Placement to offer Honors and Advanced Placement instead. This has the potential to increase rigor for

students who take the lowest level classes (in terms of challenge) and increase the rigor for students who want more rigor.

PSCs may seek to offer as many AP classes as their school population demands. By offering more AP classes, students have even more access to the rigors of AP. They also have more of an opportunity to find a class that they are interested in taking. PSCs may look for unique data points in order to recruit for AP. As mentioned previously, PSCs should not only look at stringent test cut scores, but rather multiple data points. How are the student's grades? Do teachers recommend the student? Out of several sub scores on standardized tests, is there one that may indicate that a student will do well? What college majors or career interests have been identified through career builder technology for the student? Do any indicate that participation in an AP class offered at the school may serve the student well based on their interests? By capturing these unique data points, PSCs can ascertain that no stone has been unturned when trying to identify students (minority and low-income students included) to participate in AP.

PSCs may work with middle school counselors and students in order to introduce Advanced Placement Programs. This work helps PSCs "plant the seed" about the importance of challenging one's self through AP. PSCs may create agreements with students concerning the AP program. Through these agreements, students are frontloaded with the purpose behind AP and the challenges that come with high rigor courses. Students will also learn the importance of being resilient when challenges arise instead of being able to quickly opt out of these challenges.

Theme 2: Minority and Low-Income Students

For current high school students, when it comes to scheduling, PSCs may hold guidance sessions where they discuss the benefits of AP. These sessions will allow students to gain more knowledge and ask questions about the program. Individual counseling sessions are the piece de resistance! PSCs may work hard to work with students one on one to challenge them with taking AP classes. These face to face interactions can prove to be the “game changer” students need in order to enroll in AP.

PSCs may work to teach students resilience. Whether it is through guidance sessions or individual counseling, students need to learn how to overcome difficulties and challenges. PSCs positively challenge students to “stick it out” in AP classes and to keep pushing when things get hard. Minority and low-income students need to know that they are not alone in AP classes and that others just like them have overcome the challenges that they face. As a result, PSCs may work to find student mentors who have similar backgrounds as minority and low-income students to help motivate them while taking AP classes.

PSCs may also consider unique ways to market their programs in order to gain interest and disseminate information to minority and low-income families. By doing this, PSCs can ensure that families know the benefits of having their student(s) take AP.

Theme 3: Common Pitfalls to Avoid

PSCs may work hard to avoid a few common pitfalls that others in the field have encountered in order to have a successful AP program that prioritizes access for everyone (including minority and low-income students). PSCs may consider metrics other than

one test score that suggests if a student should or should not have the opportunity to participate in AP. Furthermore, PSCs may work to remove the barrier of summer assignments in order to participate in AP classes. Many minority and low-income students have alternative responsibilities over the summer that may be a barrier to completing these assignments.

Implications

There are several implications for future practice, policy, and research. These implications are not only for PSCs, but also graduate school programs and future educational leaders that share the responsibility of creating diverse and equitable systems in schools. In this section, I will discuss implications for practice, policy, and future research.

Implications for Practice

One of the messages that I received repeatedly from my participants (all of them) was a lack of knowledge about what other counselors are doing to recruit, retain, and support minority and low-income students in AP. If this is happening among PSCs, there is a strong possibility that there is confusion among other educational leaders about the role of PSCs and other leaders at the school level. This, of course, was the basis for my research, however, it begged the question as to what else other counselors and educational leaders don't know about each other's practices. Through my interviews, it became very clear that counseling departments within the same district had a lack of communication about their systems and processes. PSCs and other school leaders may seek clarity about their roles and other leadership roles in their schools.

Through my interview with Mrs. Mission, it also became clear that PSCs lacked a common knowledge about their roles. Mrs. Mission stated, “There’s even a distorted view from school counselors on what our job responsibilities are.” PSCs and graduate school programs may seek to clarify educational leadership positions among PSCs and all schools leaders.

My interviews also yielded valuable results that current PSCs and school leaders may put into practice. To create systemic change, school leaders may consider the following: seek clarity about their roles and other leadership roles in their schools, put themselves in positions to create or change policy, gain teacher buy in, remove barriers, exposure diverse students to AP through open enrollment, examine levels and course offerings in reference to AP, capture unique data, and reach out to middle schools. To help minority and low –income families, PSCs and other school leaders may begin by hosting guidance sessions and then shift to working with diverse and low-income students individually. They may also teach resilience and seek diverse mentors that can discuss their own experiences with AP. PSCs and other school leaders may also work with minority and low-income families to ensure that they have the knowledge about the benefits of AP that will allow them to make sound decisions about their student’s participation in this program. Finally, PSCs and other school leaders may avoid common pitfalls that previous schools have made which hindered access to AP for minority and low-income families.

Implications for Policy

There are implications for policy that have been discovered through my research. These policies may be enforced at the school level and they include the following: Schools may look at their policies every school year in order to ensure that they are equitable and best for students.

Through my interviews, I also learned that PSCs have very different roles in their buildings. School leadership programs may work to understand and clarify the role of PSCs in order to ensure that they have clarified roles for themselves and their roles so they can focus on creating equitable systems for students and implementing them. These programs may also work to help educational leaders consider outdated systems and advocate for new ones. Finally, school leadership programs should consider putting their educational leadership students in positions to think creatively in order to find unique data that will highlight the best attributes of their students.

Implications for Future Research

Future researchers may seek to learn why there is a distorted view among counselors and educational leaders in general about their roles and how to create more clarity. They may focus on why PSCs lack collaboration and communication within school districts and solutions for this problem. Future researchers may also focus on why there seems to be a lack of clarity about the role of counselors (among counselors) and ways to bring this clarity to light for PSCs.

Future research may consider the many ways that educational leaders can connect minority and low-income families with schools. We know these families may struggle to

navigate school systems and advocate for their children. This future research has the potential to shift the divide between schools and families by making these systems more accessible.

My research produced extremely valuable data that can be used to create and implement new systems which can diversify and increase AP enrollments in schools. This data was produced based on six participant interviews. Future researchers may consider working with a larger sample size in order to get a bigger picture of how future educational leaders can accomplish these goals.

My research was qualitative and it produced valuable narratives from currently practicing PSCs along with a Director of PSCs. Future researchers may want to produce a study similar to Dougherty et al. (2006) and Klopfenstein (2003) by creating a quantitative study that compares the success for diverse students who were allowed to open enroll into AP classes in their schools versus those who could only access this program by testing into it. After Klopfenstein's (2003) study, these future researchers need to identify a different measure of success other than how long it takes to graduate from college. These researchers may analyze student outcomes in AP classes in terms of AP exam results among students that self-select compared to those who test into AP courses, controlling for race, gender and socioeconomic status.

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APPENDIX A

SUBJECT INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Professional School Counselors: Integral Stakeholders in the Recruitment, Retention and Support of African American, Hispanic, and Low-income Students in Advanced Placement Programs

Investigator(s) name & address: William K. Ingle, Ph.D. 1905 South 1st Street
Louisville, KY 40292

Damien Sweeney 3510 Goldsmith Lane, Louisville, KY 40220

Site(s) where study is to be conducted: Jefferson County Public Schools 3332 Newburg Rd, Louisville, KY 40218

Phone number for subjects to call for questions: 502-836-2760

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted Damien Sweeney (Doctoral Candidate for Educational Leadership at the University of Louisville). The principal investigator of this study is William K. Ingle, PhD. The study is sponsored by the University of Louisville, Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development. The study will take place at Jefferson County Public Schools. Approximately six subjects will be invited to participate that include one Director of School Counselors and five Professional School Counselors.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to answer the following research question: How do school counselors remove barriers for culturally diverse and low-income students by recruiting, retaining and supporting them in Advanced Placement (AP) courses? In addition, I hope to learn about your experiences as you have helped to diversify your school's Advanced Placement program.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview with me. My interview protocol is attached to this consent form. My interview should take between 20 to 45 minutes. Interviews will be audio recorded. You may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Potential Risks

There are no foreseeable risks, although there may be unforeseen risks.

Benefits

There are several possible benefits to this study. I seek to identify tangible solutions and systems that PSCs report, which can inform instruction in university counseling programs and PSC practices in school districts that ultimately improve minority and low-income students' access to challenging college preparatory curriculum, academic achievement, and postsecondary options. This study also seeks to offer more PSCs throughout the district, state, region and country a system that will allow them to diversify their AP programs by providing educational opportunities and advantages to low-income and minority students. While the information collected may not benefit you directly, the information learned in this study may be helpful to others.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you are in this study.

Confidentiality

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records:

The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Program Office,

Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP)

Security

Your information will be kept private by using pseudonyms throughout this study. Interviews will be digitally recorded and then secured on a password-locked computer along with professional transcriptions of those interviews. Prior to conducting any interviews, I will secure permission from the school district in which my participants work. Participants will be given a copy of the signed consent.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

Contact Persons, Research Subject's Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options. You may contact the principal investigator at 502-836-2760. If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO) (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study.

If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877-852-1167. You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Acknowledgment and Signatures

This informed consent document is not a contract. This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in the study. You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Subject Name (Please Print)
Date

Signature of Subject

Printed Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)
Date

Signature of Legal Representative

Relationship of Legal Representative to Subject

Printed Name of Investigator
Date Signed

Signature of Investigator

Investigators:
William K. Ingle, PhD
Damien Sweeney

Phone Numbers:
502-852-6097
502-836-2760

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Please discuss your AP involvement and interest in the AP program at your school.
2. Please discuss the enrollment process for students at your school.
3. What do you see as the largest barrier for your minority students to enroll in AP classes?
4. What have you done to remove that barrier?
5. What is your process for recruiting AP students?
6. How is this different than conventional wisdom or popular strategies used by PSCs to recruit AP students?
7. Have you observed any barriers to retaining minority students in AP classes?
8. How have you dealt with those barriers?
9. What have you done to support minority students in AP classes?
10. Do you have anything you'd like to add to the conversation that you believe would be helpful to this study?

CURRICULUM VITAE

Damien Sweeney

6333 Moonseed Dr.
Louisville, KY 40059
(502) 836-2760
damien.sweeney@jefferson.kyschools.us

Education:

University of Louisville	Ed.D., December 2016
Graduate Program, Department of Education Leadership, Foundations, and Human Resource. Dissertation Topic: Professional School Counselors: Integral Stakeholders in the Recruitment, Retention and Support of African American, Latino, and Low-income Students in Advanced Placement Programs.	

University of Louisville	Masters in Secondary Counseling, May 2009
Graduate Program, Department of Counseling and Human Development	

Bellarmino University	Rank I, December 2006
Graduate Program, Frazier Thornton School of Education M.A.T. in Secondary English and K-12 Special Education	

Transylvania University	Bachelor of Arts, May 2004
Philosophy Major, English Minor Activities and Awards: Member of Varsity Soccer Team Transylvania University Diversity Enhancement Program Invited to and Participated in Rutgers University Institute for Diversity in Philosophy Summer Program Member of Athletes in Action Soccer Team (Ireland)	

Employment History:

Seneca High School	<i>Guidance Counselor, 2010-Current</i>
Louisville Male High School, Louisville, KY	<i>English Teacher, 2007-2009</i>
Fairdale High School M.C.A., Louisville, KY	<i>Special Education Teacher, 2004-2007</i>